

“LET’S GET COZY AND COMFY AND CUDDLE UP AND TALK ABOUT  
MURDER.” MY FAVORITE MURDER AND THE NEW TRUE CRIME

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: “Let’s Get Cozy and Comfy and Cuddle Up and Talk about Murder:” *My Favorite Murder* and the new true crime

This study analyzes the contribution of the podcast *My Favorite Murder* to the discourse of the true crime genre. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, and Feminist Media Research the study uncovers how the hosts of the podcast use discourse about gender, class, race, and ability to both reinforce and challenge traditional true crime narratives.

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Men are afraid that women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them.

-Margaret Atwood

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 2016, *My Favorite Murder*, (MFM) a quaintly produced true crime comedy podcast skyrocketed to popularity. After only about two months of existence, MFM stole the number one spot on the iTunes comedy podcast charts. True crime has been around for a long time, and modern true crime hit its peak in popularity in the 1970s and 80s (Murley, 2008). Recently, however, popular culture has seen a rise in the popularity of the true crime genre once again with stories like Adnan Syed's in *Serial* and Steven Avery's in *Making a Murderer* focusing on the messy complexities of the American criminal justice system in its social context (Cruz, 2015; Koenig, 2014; Demos & Ricciardi, 2015). MFM, however, offers a truly unique true crime platform at the intersection of comedy and feminism.

True crime boasts a long history of criticism and degradation (Browder, 2006; Murley, 2008). Critics claim that the genre is misogynistic, pornographic, sensational, and has no purpose other than to increase fear of violent crime in its historically female audience (Browder, 2006; Caputi, 1987; Dowler, Fleming & Muzzatti, 2006; Durham, Elrod & Kinkade, 1995). Literary criticism is, however, steeped in patriarchal tradition, which trivializes what has been deemed "women's literature" (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). While war histories, a traditionally masculine genre, offer entirely acceptable forays into scenes of violence and destruction, literary critics paint true crime as simply a reckless exploitation of suffering and tragedy (Vicary & Fraley, 2010).

Women's alienation from violent media has worked to silence them on the matter. Patriarchal literary criticisms of the true crime genre work to further alienate women

from creating a discourse of violence, even the kind that exists in their own backyards. By producing MFM out of a living room, however, hosts Georgia Hardstark and Karen Kilgariff blur the lines between gendered “private” and “public” spaces. They create a feminine and feminist platform that publicizes and justifies women’s consumption of true crime, while critiquing a patriarchal society, which has made their consumption of it “taboo.” Through this discourse, they have formed a large and strong community of fans and content producers they lovingly refer to as “murderinos.”

Despite the podcast’s superficially strong inculcation of feminism into the true crime genre, it falls short of being truly inclusive and revolutionary. MFM still relies heavily on true crime stereotypes and narrative tropes, which work to marginalize certain groups of people from the national discourse on crime and justice. In MFM, as in the true crime genre tradition, victims are almost always young, white, middle to upper-middle class, cisnormative women, offenders are often developmentally disabled, and stories of minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged people are hardly ever told. However, when Karen and Georgia do speak about race, class, and the criminal justice system, they do so intently and with intellectual vigor. But the majority of these discussions focus on a very particular type of justice for a very particular type of victim. Ultimately, this podcast speaks to an exclusively second wave feminist audience of young, white, middle to upper-middle class, cisnormative women.

Despite its exclusionary discourse, the comedic and at least somewhat feminist atmosphere of the podcast still offers a positive space for the imagined audience of the podcast. Previous audience studies work with the true crime genre has revealed that consuming true crime can act as a therapeutic exercise for women who want to learn how

to avoid violence or even to re-narrativize their own traumatic histories (Browder, 2006; Vicary & Fraley, 2010). A comedic framework offers further therapeutic potential through its ability to unite oppressed people beneath a rebellious discourse (Obrdlik, 1942; Thorson, 1993).

Ultimately, MFM both perpetuates and reconfigures the true crime genre. It maintains the true crime status quo of appealing to an audience of white, middle to upper-middle class, cisnormative women while alienating minorities from a discourse of crime and justice. However, though their commentaries on race, class, and criminal justice are few and far between, Karen and Georgia capitalize on new media's freedom from institutional media production traditions to take steps towards a more inclusive true crime discourse.

Chapter 2 outlines the history of the true crime genre and juxtaposes scholarly responses to it, including negative critiques which decry the genre as lurid, misrepresentative and harmful and positive reviews which understand the genre as a pedagogical and therapeutic space. This chapter also delineates new media's potential for intervention into the genre. In this chapter, I also address the use of humor as a feminist tool, a tool for critiquing oppressive societies, and a tool for the re-narrativization of trauma. The third chapter outlines my methodology. In this chapter I justify my sample for analysis, explicate my data coding process, and explain my use of Critical Discourse Analysis, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, and Feminist Media Research. Chapter 4 discusses the space of MFM as a domestic and feminine one which encourages the critique of patriarchal culture. Chapter 5 analyzes MFM's discourse of gender, race, class, and ability and compares it to traditional true crime narratives. Chapter 6 details

MFM's potential as a healing and pedagogical space for women which encourages the development of a discourse about trauma.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In *The Rise of True Crime: 20th Century Murder and American Popular Culture* (2008), Jean Murley questions why she was drawn to the true crime genre. She explains the simultaneous satisfaction of criminal offenders being caught and punished and the genre's unsettling focus on the middle class and its "gnawing undercurrent of unmitigated evil" (p. 1). In her book she questions the rigid yet flexible true crime narrative tradition and works towards an understanding of the misunderstood "cultural work" that the genre does (Murley, 2008). She defines true crime as a "murder narrative," which is a presentation of factual events tinted with the writer's own beliefs and values (Murley, 2008, p. 6). Because these stories are consistently imbued with the author's own biases, they reflect social context of the times through displaying "shifts in widespread religious beliefs, philosophical understandings about crime, definitions of insanity, and shifting perspectives on the meaning of mystery of radical evil" (p. 7).

True crime literature has been a subject of public fascination since since the printing press began to encourage public literacy (Burger, 2016). Although the genre has historically been decried as lurid and distasteful, the earliest consumers of true crime in the 16th century were members of the upper class (Burger, 2016). It was primarily distributed through the media of "broadsheets, pamphlets, and executions sermons" (Murley, 2008, p. 7). True crime as a religious instrument boasted almost none of the characteristics that define the genre today. Instead of focusing on the "shock and horror" of the modern murder narrative, religious true crime aimed to educate the public about

the mortal consequences of sin (Murley, 2008). Murderers were viewed as “common sinners” who should be forgiven for their all too human errors (Murley, 2008, p. 7).

As printing technology became more ubiquitous, true crime rippled across myriad forms of media including books, pamphlets, ballads, trial accounts, and penny dreadfuls (Burger, 2016; Murley, 2008). The penny press in particular produced sensational accounts of crime for its working class audience, steeping their stories in “political rivalry and class consciousness, which appealed to the increasingly literate journeymen, mechanics, and laborers of the large city” (Murley, 2008, p. 9). As true crime entered a Gothic Horror phase, it shifted focus away from religious pedagogy and towards biographical details of the killers themselves told with an air of sensationalization (Burger, 2016; Murley, 2008). In the 19th century established and reputable authors such as Charles Dickens became true crime writers themselves, and the genre began painting killers as sub-human and monstrous. Melodrama prevailed (Murley, 2008).

In the 20th century, true crime took a forensic scientific approach towards profiling killers, and narratives recreated the scene of the crime (Murley, 2008). Additionally, these new murder narratives pushed for “the maintenance of the status quo with a law and order bent,” a trait which continues throughout various iterations of the genre today (Murley, 2008, p. 11).

The modern true crime era began in the 1940’s and 1950’s and was greatly influenced by the pulpy tales of *True Detective* magazine (Murley, 2008). The genre exploded in popularity in the 1970’s and 1980’s, fully developing into a profitable portion of the paperback publishing industry (Murley, 2008). It was during a time of massive social upheaval in the United States “with the advent of New Journalism and

frightening upsurge in violent crime” that true crime came into its own (Murley, 2008, p. 5). The genre presents a way of life and a worldview, which is perhaps pessimistic and slightly paranoid, but one that is ultimately concerned with safety and justice (Murley, 2008). The history of true crime has spawned today’s murder narrative, which is “pithy, formulaic, objective, lightly fictionalized journalistic” material, which consistently blurs the distinction between reality and fantasy (p. 13).

Narrative devices borrowed from fiction goads true crime writers towards speculation, character development, and dramatic buildup towards suspense (Murley, 2008). The genre employs comfortable formulaic narratives about victims and offenders who fit an exclusive mold. In doing so it grossly misrepresents the demographics of violent crime, ignoring the “intersection of race and poverty in its formulation of the dominant murder narrative, largely because true crime is a quasifantasy genre, one invested in entertainment, escapism, and most recently in the tragic reversal of the romance narrative” (Murley, 2008, p. 142). True crime is not interested in the every-day violence of real disadvantaged and underserved communities, but instead in unique, incomprehensible stories of “monsters” and damsels in distress complete with mystery and intrigue (Murley, 2008).

Since Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1965), the true crime genre has created and sustained a number of archetypal characters (Murley, 2008). One of these archetypes is that of the socio-psychopath. The sociopath is described as “a person who has no conscience but can function in society” (Murley, 2008, p. 4). The psychopath, on the other hand, “is conscienceless, prone to violence and has paranoid, grandiose, or schizoid delusions, making it hard for him to function ‘normally’ in relationships, in

employment, and in general society” (Murley, 2008, p. 4). True crime separates these offenders from any macroscopic societal injustices or flaws that may have lead to their actions (Murley, 2008). Instead of telling the stories of people pushed into committing violent crime because of systematized injustices against minorities and the socioeconomically disadvantaged, true crime relies on psychopathy and sociopathy to deploy narratives rife with intrigue into sadistic killers who kill for pleasure (Murley, 2008).

The majority of the true crime genre tells the stories of “ideal” victims who are young, innocent, cishnormative, white women from the middle to upper classes (Cavender, Bond-Maupin, & Jurik, 1999; Durham, Elrod, & Kinkade, 1995; Murley, 2008). True crime storytellers often measure the worth of victims by their physical appearances and/or their saint-like selflessness (Cavender, Bond-Maupin, & Jurik, 1999). Whereas pre-modern true crime focused on victimized “fallen women,” (often sex workers) modern true crime sends a message that no matter how “good” a woman may be, ultimately all women are in danger. The narrative device of the “ideal victim” also perpetuates ideas of which types of victims deserve public sympathy. According to Murley, “One truism of true crime is that some deaths ‘matter’ more than others, and some killers ‘matter’ more than others” (2008, p. 143). Overall, minority victims do not receive proportional attention from the true crime genre (Dowler, Fleming, & Muzzatti, 2006). In an *Atlantic* article entitled “The New True Crime,” Lenika Cruz (2015) poignantly asks, “When was the last time the victim in a true-crime story was a young, unarmed black man?”



Offenders in the true crime genre are generally white men (Cavender, Bond-Maupin, & Jurik, 1999; Durham, Elrod, & Kinkade, 1995), while the few stories about minority offenders “are rife with racial stereotypes” (Dowler, Fleming, & Muzzatti, 2006). White men are also generally protagonists of the stories (Cavender, Bond-Maupin, & Jurik, 1999). In television true crime shows, for example, women are fragile, hyperfeminine beings in constant danger who need to be protected by hypermasculine male heroes or authority figures. While women may have brief speaking roles, narratives are mostly constructed by male heroes and experts (Cavender, Bond-Maupin, & Jurik, 1999). People with developmental disabilities are also overrepresented as offenders, thus perpetuating stereotypes that developmentally disabled people are violent and prone to criminal behavior (Parrott & Parrott, 2015).

The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) information about “Crimes Against Persons” (including violent crimes) for 2015 corroborates the true crime narrative. According to their statistics, victims are: 1) adults ages 21-30, 2) women by a slim margin (58%), and 3) White (67%) (FBI). Most offenders are 1) adults, 2) males (71%), and 3) White (58%) (FBI). However, the U.S. Department of Justice’s (DOJ) 2015 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) tells a slightly different story. According to these statistics, victims of violent crimes are largely: 1) young, 2) female, 3) minority races, and 4) lower socio-economic status (Truman & Morgan, 2015). According to the NCVS only 47% of violent crimes were actually reported in 2015, which might explain the discrepancy between their statistics and the FBI’s. Although true crime tells a story in which almost every criminal is caught

and punished, in reality fewer than half of violent crimes are ever solved (Gramlich, 2017).

These more recent statistics contradict what has been dubbed the “fear of crime paradox” spoken about in much scholarly literature about true crime (Browder, 2006; Caputi, 1987; Ugwu & Britto, 2014). This paradox explains (or used to explain) the discrepancy between women’s fear of crime and their actual likelihood of victimization. According to the paradox, though women fear violent crime significantly more than do men, they are at a significantly lower risk of experiencing it (Ugwu & Britto, 2014). True crime scholars explain that actual victims of violent crime are largely men (Durham, Elrod, & Kinkade, 1995). This may have historically been true. Even the NCVS shows a significant rise in violent crime against women between 2014 and 2015. However, at least for 2015, the FBI and DOJ agree that women are at more risk of being the victims of violent crime than ever.

Ultimately, true crime perpetuates a number of stereotypes about crime. Primarily, it suggests a narrow understanding of who can be a sympathetic victim of a crime (usually young, white, upper to upper-middle class, cisnormative women.) This view alienates minorities from cultural narratives about criminal justice (Cruz, 2015) despite the fact that they comprise the majority of violent crime victims (Turner & Morgan, 2015). The genre also perpetuates the criminalization of developmentally disability by pushing forth a notion that they are prone to criminal behavior (Mayes, 2015). These stereotypes misrepresent reality, contributing to the further discursive marginalization of minority groups from the criminal justice system (Murley, 2015; Mayes, 2015), and uphold conservative values of gender, class, race and justice

(Browder, 2006). True crime accepts violence as a form of entertainment, it often focuses on violence against women, and the stories it tells takes place in a racially and socio-economically homogenous space (Murley, 2008). In this way, “true crime can be read as a countercurrent to the social progress and cultural changes -feminism, multiculturalism, political correctness- that have transformed American life in the past four decades” (Murley, 2008, p. 3). But, despite its many flaws, true crime does conduct important cultural work. Murley (2008) argues that it encourages a philosophical and ethical discourse that allows readers to make sense of an increasingly violent society. However, true crime is more concerned with the characters of the murder narrative it creates than with focusing on the social and judicial system that created these killers in the first place (Murley, 2008).

True crime can at times appear pornographic in its tendency towards thick description of sexual violence, crossing the line from what some may consider tasteful to salacious (Browder, 2006). Some feminist theorists argue that true crime narratives, which often focus on the rape and murder of women, perpetuate and celebrate a culture of misogyny (Caputi, 1987). This derogatory view of the genre has contributed to its lack of serious study (Murley, 2008).

A 2006 study finds that two-thirds to three-quarters of true crime readers are women (Browder, 2006). Women are attracted to the true crime’s depiction of violence specifically, as opposed to war histories (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). Women’s reading of true crime goes far beyond a pornographic, voyeuristic experience of violence. Murley (2008) explains:

True crime is a way of making sense of the senseless, but it has also become a worldview, an outlook, and a perspective on contemporary American life, one that is cynical, narrowly focused on the worst kinds of crimes, and preoccupied with safety, order, and justice (p. 2).

Women use the genre to learn and even to heal (Browder, 2006; Vicary & Fraley, 2010). True crime offers an almost forbidden pedagogical sanctuary “in a world in which women fear violence, but are culturally proscribed from showing an interest in violence” (Browder, 2006, p. 929). True crime media often contains stories of survival and escape that can act lessons for women looking to avoid becoming victims themselves. Even in stories that end in death, women can learn from victims’ fatal mistakes (Vicary & Fraley, 2010; Browder, 2006). Furthermore, women are more likely to choose to read true crime books that provide insight to reasons behind an offender’s actions (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). By learning what causes people to commit violent crimes, readers learn to look for and detect these behaviors in people around them (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). In fact, fans of true crime rejected the idea of reading fiction about violent crimes because these stories would not provide the type of education they looked for in true crime books (Browder, 2006). Evolutionary theorists support this idea, arguing that humans’ fascination with murder is a tactic for survival (Buss, 2005). However, this argument stands in stark contrast to the one made by Murley (2008) who argues that it is precisely because they cannot be understood that true crime readers find narratives about socio-psychopaths so fascinating.

True crime books can also offer a veiled criticism of a patriarchal culture (Murley, 2008). In the 1970s, true crime began to focus on violent crimes committed not by

random strangers but within family units by patriarchal figures (Murley, 2008). One woman even explained that she read true crime as a way to learn “how she could avoid raising serial killers” (Brower, 2006, p. 935). Browder (2006) argues that true crime is a “dystopian romance” which picks up where romance novels leave off. True crime narratives tell the story of what happens after the hypermasculine, domineering hero marries the damsel in distress and then changes into a monster. True crime reveals what might happen to “gullible” women who take romance novels too seriously (Browder, 2006).

The genre can also act as a healing method for women who have experienced trauma (Browder, 2006). Feminist trauma theory suggests that healing need not be approached through traditional psychiatric and neuro scientific methods. Instead, trauma therapy should focus on unfolding narratives and meaning-making processes that allow for the narrativization of traumatic experiences and facilitate relationships between survivors and their confidantes (Tseris, 2013, p. 161). For survivors of trauma whose “experiences have denied their human rights to safety and dignity,” meaning making is a very important process of healing as it allows them to understand the experience through logical narrative (Tseris, 2013, p. 161).

Furthermore, trauma need not be defined by a singular instance (Muzak, 2009; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This “insidious trauma” contributes to a worldview that can be held by a single individual or even an entire marginalized people (Muzak, 2009). Ultimately, it can lend itself to symptoms such as “anxiety, depression, paranoia, and substance abuse” (Muzak, 2009, p. 29). Feminist trauma theories attempt to reconfigure previously pathologized results of trauma (such as certain anti-social behaviors) as

meaningful survival tactics (Muzak, 2009). True crime may offer trauma survivors a medium through which to re-narrativize their own experiences and to envision a world where perpetrators are always caught and punished (Browder, 2006).

MFM represents a departure from most traditional and even modern true crime media formats. The podcasts' hosts, stand-up comedian, Karen Kilgariff and former Cooking Channel host, Georgia Hardstark, skyrocketed into the (somewhat) public eye. Though MFM started only in January of 2016, it already boasts four and a half out of five stars on iTunes from 8,200 reviews. Additionally, MFM has 46,000 followers on Twitter, 59,317 "group members" on Facebook, and 96,300 followers on Instagram. The show is produced by the Feral Audio network, which is "fiercely independent," meaning it is "100% creator owned, uncut, and unfiltered" (Feral Audio).

Historically, only a small percentage of people with production resources controlled radio content for a much larger audience. However, new media in the digital age offers a more democratic platform for diverse and creative production methods and content (Berry, 2006; Sterne, Morris, Baker, & Freire, 2008). Television, for example, has recently seen such a disruption in production techniques. With the advent of user generated content (UGC) websites like YouTube and Vimeo, producers have been able to turn away from strict network and advertiser control and towards more creative freedom (Aymar, 2014; Berry, 2006). Not having to appease profit driven entities with safe content, artists can explore riskier subject matter like race, sexuality, and metanarrative uncovering the plight of the modern artist (Berry, 2006; Symons, 2016). New media platforms disrupt traditional hierarchies by throwing out gatekeepers and giving power to

a more diverse cast of people who depend on fans and sponsors to finance them (Aymar, 2014; Berry, 2006).

Unlike audiovisual T.V. production, high quality audio recording and editing tools are easily accessible (Sterne, Morris, Baker, & Freire, 2008). The Really Simple Syndication (RSS) delivery system of podcasting which automatically updates subscribers' media libraries with each new episodes makes for an ease in distribution, portability, and ability to timeshift which broadcast radio has never had (Sterne, Morris, Baker, & Freire, 2008). Though radio has always been an intimate medium, this portability across space and time contributes to a deeper feeling of connection; listeners can take their favorite shows with them where they want and listen to them when they want (Berry, 2006; Edmond, 2014).

New media lends itself to convergence, or:

the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation of multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2).

Jenkins (2006) defines convergence as a cultural shift that depends on two important concepts: participatory culture and collective intelligence. The former refers to consumer's active participation. Fans create their own realities of a media product and participate by sharing pieces of their reality with a larger audience of fans. The latter refers to the collective process of media consumption and knowledge. With each fan offering up her own knowledge into participatory spaces, the collective intelligence of consumers ends up being greater than the sum of the individual parts of knowledge that

fans hold separately (Jenkins, 2006). It can “grow, evolve, and collectively learn through ongoing interaction” (Flew, 2014, p. 79). UGC blurs the line between media consumers and producers. It is part of the dialogic nature of “Web 2.0” media, which encourages production and openness to “interaction and feedback from others” (Flew, 2014, p. 34). Web 2.0 is the easily accessible Internet software that encourages Internet users to create and sustain websites like Wikipedia and YouTube through interactivity, participation, and UGC (Flew, 2014).

Convergence culture happens both from the top down (media conglomerates looking to appease consumers) and from the bottom up (consumers looking to participate) (Jenkins, 2006). Ultimately, convergence culture operates best when these two approaches happen simultaneously. While grassroots media diversifies, broadcast media amplifies. (Jenkins, 2006) For this reason, “the power of participation comes not from destroying commercial culture but from writing over it, modding it, amending it, expanding it, adding greater diversity of perspective, and then recirculating it, feeding it back into the mainstream media” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 268). According to Jenkins (2006) this makes participation an important political right, as integral as free speech.

The idea of “community media” arises out of new media’s democratization of media production tools and its fostering of media diversity (Atton, 2002). Community media distinguishes itself from other media forms through three factors. Primarily, community media production does not require traditional professional skill or hierarchy. Secondly, it is anti-institutional in its production and dissemination of alternate ideas and its independence from media conglomerations. Finally, it strays away from traditional capitalistic forms of media, which cost money, to produce and whose primary goal is to



make money (Atton, 2002). These three characteristics of community media encourage egalitarian production methods that promote a variety of voices historically marginalized from media production. (Atton & Hamilton, 2008) What is problematic, however, is the “participation gap” that exists between consumers who are empowered to participate and consumers whose voices rise above the participation culture cacophony (Jenkins, 2006).

Though the dawn of convergence and its ensuing epistemological crisis led some to bemoan the loss of expertise and authority figures, others see the benefits of participatory culture (Flew, 2014). As the line blurs between media producers and consumers, audiences become more empowered allowing for a larger diversity of voices to be heard and for some voices to come out of hiding. This diversification has inspired more niche audiences who were previously afraid to or incapable of sharing their voices to do so (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Berry, 2006; Flew, 2014).

Murley (2008) argues that the Internet opens up a space for true crime to become more collaborative and community oriented in a way that increases the cultural work done by the genre. The opening of true crime via the Internet can even allow for a more analytical approach to the genre that works against the tabloidism of the past (and present) (Murley, 2008). It also increases the potential for collective intelligence, giving audiences access to all kinds of archival material including older murder narratives, government documents, and scholarly articles (Murley, 2008). Blogging and the advent of Web 2.0 offered a more democratic accessibility to producing murder narratives. An infiltration of new voices into the genre has worked against true crime’s tired tropes of “oversensationalized, superficial, and dumbed-down depictions of murder... focused on the murder or disappearance of young, attractive, middle or upper-middle class and

(usually) white women or girls,” often with a political agenda aimed to inserting lesser known cases into the true crime discourse (Murley, 2008, p. 135). Unfortunately, not all armature producers of true crime escape the traps of the historic genre. Stories about the sexual assault, kidnapping, and murder of young white women and children continue to be a salient theme within the discourse of true crime. “Ultimately,” Murley argues, the Internet “upholds the true crime status quo” (2008, p. 133).

Though the true crime genre has remained static in many ways (Burger, 2016; Cruz, 2015), it has also changed (Cruz, 2015). New media has transformed the genre into a “modern form” through its participatory platforms (Cruz, 2015). With the new media paradigm shift, true crime discourse is becoming more complex. It is starting to shift focus from stereotype laden stories about crazed serial killers and their innocent, white female victims towards understanding issues embedded within the criminal justice system (Cruz, 2015). These issues often allow offenders to reach their murderous potentials, or even (in the case of Adnan Syed from *Serial*) cause potentially innocent citizens to be wrongfully imprisoned (Cruz, 2015). Cruz argues, “True crime may, in the coming decades, further challenge which kinds of victims deserve sympathy and which kinds of crimes should provoke outrage and disgust” (2015). The genre is beginning to re-define itself among an engaged, media savvy, and participatory audience who are developing a collective intelligence about the flawed criminal justice system.

Many female fans of true crime have grown up in cultures that tell them not to be interested in violence (Browder, 2006). However, women are also constantly told that the world is not a safe place for them (Browder, 2006). Thus, women who develop an interest in true crime are taught to be ashamed of their interests and to keep their secret hobby to

themselves or else offend polite society (Browder, 2006). However, Browder (2006) found that among her study participants, most true crime readers were a part of one or more online fan groups, perhaps relieved and excited to find others like them.

The centuries long oppression of a niche audience and the dawn of new media and Web 2.0 platforms created a perfect storm, which allowed for niche true crime audience members to finally connect with each other and to speak openly about their fascination with the genre. This swelling of the true crime discourse has drawn attention from popular media outlets and scholars alike speculating on the draw of MFM and its ever increasing community. A BuzzFeed article describes the podcast as a kind of feminist “cry of resistance” against previous iterations of the true crime genre that treated women like plot devices or even blamed them for behavior that “got them killed” (Koul, 2017). MFM refutes a patriarchal culture that tells women to always be kind and polite to strangers, even when their instincts tell them otherwise. In “How a True-Crime Podcast Became a Mental-Health Support Group,” Andrea Marks (2017) explains that Karen’s and Georgia’s openness about their own struggles with mental health and experiences with therapy have encouraged listeners to seek professional help. She explains that many listeners speak about listening to MFM as a kind of “exposure therapy,” which helps them to understand and prepare for the dangers that may be out there. These listeners explain that broaching two taboo subjects simultaneously (mental health and murder) allows them to ruminate on and discuss how these topics pertain to their everyday lived experiences as women (Koul, 2017; Marks, 2017). Social media is increasingly becoming a space for mental health discourse (Betton & Tomlinson, 2013; Choudhury & De, 2014). Disclosing mental health issues online and finding online support communities can

promote healing and coping (Choudhury & De, 2014). MFM provides a platform through which to do so (Koul, 2017; Marks, 2017).

But authors describe the consumption of true crime as a double-edged sword, and the benefits and drawbacks of the genre are complex and confusing at best (Murley, 2008, Vicary & Fraley, 2010). Consuming true crime narratives and interacting with other true crime fans can relieve a sense of loneliness and isolation in taste (Murley, 2008, Vicary & Fraley, 2010). It also provides a space for a dialogue about injustice that can lead to meaningful social action. (Murley, 2008) At the same time, some authors argue that it has the potential to increase the salience of violent crime in a person's worldview leading to anxiety, fear, and paranoia (Murley, 2008; Vicary & Fraley, 2010), and perpetuate stereotypical ideas about crime and demographics (Murley, 2008) .

Cultivation theory, originally proposed by George Gerbner in 1967, is a macrosystem theory, which looks to understand the gradual influence of media messages on the everyday lives of people who are exposed to them (Potter, 2014). The new, mass produced method of media creates what Gerbner calls a "common culture" among media consumers which rests on their shared meanings inspired by mass media (Gerbner, 1969). One of the upshots of cultivated media exposure is the "Mean World Syndrome," or the idea that the world is a much more violent and destructive place than it actually is (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Assessing the legacy of Gerber's influential theory nearly half a century later, W. James Potter (2014) finds that the theory ultimately has little empirical support. Potter (2014) argues that there is only partial support that widespread meaning across televisions exists and that there is not data suggesting that people curate specific worldview corresponding to media messages over time.

The “fear of crime paradox,” which suggests that women entertain an unjustified fear of violent crime because of media exposure to it, presents a similar media effects theory. Historically, women have expressed a greater fear in violent crime than have men (Ugwu & Bitto, 2015). This paradox has been the basis for many scholars’ arguments against the true crime genre that say that the genre only serves to reinforce fears. However, when fear of rape is presented alongside fear of violent crime in studies on fear of crime, the differences of fear of violent crime between men and women disappear (Ferraro, 1995, 1996; Fisher and Sloan, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lane & Fox, 2013; May, 2001; Ugwu & Britto, 2015). This suggests that women’s fear of violent crime is due to their fear of sexual assault, which they are more likely to experience (Ugwu & Britto, 2015; Truman & Morgan, 2015). With recent violent crime statistics revealing that women are, in fact, more likely than men to be victims of violent crime perhaps the fear of crime paradox becomes outdated (Truman & Morgan, 2015).

Though very different from true crime, comedy also offers a non-traditional pathway towards healing. Women have historically been objects (as opposed to subjects) of humor (Gilbert, 1997; Kotthoff, 2006). Humor’s aggressive nature manipulates social environments by calling attention to a person and a particular subject matter (Kotthoff, 2006). It has historically been a vehicle for social critique and therefore a form of socio-cultural destruction and creation which is a power traditionally reserved for men (Kotthoff, 2006; Mintz, 1985; Moore, 1998). Thus, in American society humor performed by men affirms the status quo (Kotthoff, 1997). Women, on the other hand, have traditionally been encouraged to respond passively to men’s humor, either to laugh or be laughed at (Gilbert, 1997). It is women who stand to disrupt the status quo most by

performing humor themselves. In this way, all women's comedy is a form of subversion simply by denying historical oppression (Gilbert, 1997).

Feminine humor is more likely than traditional male humor to create social bonds rather than test them through put-down style jokes, or humor at the expense or in spite of others (Kotthoff, 2006; Mintz, 1985). Instead, feminine humor often uses self-deprecatory comedy to focus on commonalities as a way to create intimacy and familiarity (Kotthoff, 2006; Mintz, 1985). In this historically marginalized population comedy operates as therapy, allowing women to joke about and critique various daily struggles thus embracing the "power of powerlessness" (Gilbert, p. 326).

Humor is essential to human life (Hall, Keeter, & Williamson, 1993; Obrdlik, 1942; Thorson, 1993). It allows people to reflect on society and the human condition in unique and important ways (Hall, Keeter, & Williamson, 1993). It allows people to bond over shared meaning and experiences and to cope with what can sometimes be a dark existence. Hall, Keeter, and Williamson (1993) outline three types of popular humor. Functional humor promotes social cohesion by focusing on common values and meanings. Conflict humor takes a critical view of society by highlighting injustices and calling for social change. Feminist humor aims to agitate collective social consciousness by illuminating gender inequalities (Hall, Keeter, & Williamson, 1993).

During the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia during the Second World War, Antonin J. Obrdlik spent time observing the use of humor among citizens (Obrdik, 1942). He defines "gallows humor" as the type of humor "which arises in connection with a precarious or dangerous situation." (Obrdik, 1942, p. 709) When used by innocent members of an oppressed group of people it signifies "the expression of hope and wishful

thinking” (Obrdik, 1942, p. 710). Gallows humor works in two ways, it both incites resistance against an oppressive force and undermines the oppressive force, itself (Obrdik, 1942). People use gallows humor with a “purposeful intention” as a type of social control to maintain morale:

These people simply have to persuade themselves as well as others that their present suffering is only temporary, that it will soon be all over, that once again they will live as they used to live before they were crushed. In a word, they have to strengthen their hope because otherwise they could not bear the strains to which their nerves are exposed. Gallows humor, full of invectives and irony, is their psychological escape, and it is in this sense that I call gallows humor psychological compensation. It’s social influence is enormous... an unmistakable index of good morale and of the spirit of resistance in the oppressed peoples (Obrdik, 1942, p. 712).

Obrdik (1942) argues that gallows humor performs an extremely important social function, a necessity of life. It is an “extremely powerful weapon” against oppressive forces and a valuable tool to measure morale (Obrdik, 1942).

But not all humor related to death is gallows humor (Thorson, 1993, p. 17). There are two types of gallows humor. The first type is intentionally designed to aid coping mechanisms and is encouraged by “our collective death anxiety” (Thorson, 1993, p. 18). Making light of death allows those involved in gallows humor to cope with the inevitability of death. The second type of gallows humor is humor at the death of someone else or in the expense of the person who has died, however, is a “lower” form of

gallows humor, which allows those engaging in this type of humor to distance themselves from death (Thorson, 1993, p. 19).

Feminist humor, similarly, has been used as a resistive force (Swink, 2017). Four basic characteristics define feminist humor: 1) it criticizes gender inequalities and stereotypes, 2) it is empowering for women, 3) it mocks men and hegemonic masculinity, and 4) it requires a stage. Feminist humor represents an important infiltration of a traditionally male dominated space and has become a much-utilized space for women who want to speak out against patriarchal culture (Swink, 2017).

Humor can be used as a therapeutic tool for trauma survivors (Garrick, 2006). It helps to reduce fear by inserting new, comical meaning into pathological fear structures (Garrick, 2006). Laughter can even promote physical healing by producing active T cells and killer cells, which fight disease and produces endorphins, the body's natural painkiller and stress reliever (Garrick, 2006). Garrick (2006) argues that using humor in therapy must be an open and self-reflexive process starting with the therapist herself discovering what humor means to her and then finding out what humor means to her client. Therapy should create a "safe space" in which clients who, "often feel guilty for the things they found humorous and believed 'normal' people would not laugh at" can feel free to explore their senses of humor as a vital coping mechanism (Garrick, 2006, p. 179). Garrick (2006) argues that humor is a tool that should be used in group therapy as well as individual therapy in order to help clients form important healing bonds with others in order to reduce feelings of loneliness or isolation. Though humor can be an incredibly important step towards healing, humor in the face of trauma can still be considered taboo.



True crime has a long history. It has transformed from a tool of religious redemption to salacious penny press pulp, to modern status quo perpetuating melodrama (Burger, 2016; Murley, 2008). Modern true crime is more fiction than it is truth, relying on a number of narrative tropes to appeal to its audience. Murder narratives almost always tell the story of the same “ideal victim” and often include depictions of the feared “socio-psychopath” (Cavender, Bond-Maupin, & Jurik, 1999; Durham, Elrod, & Kinkade, 1995; Murley, 2008). Unfortunately, in these whitewashed narratives, true crime fails to confront the true picture of crime in the United States (Cruz, 2015; Dowler, Fleming, & Muzzatti, 2006). Historically, the effects of violent crime have been felt most keenly by men of color in lower socioeconomic classes. However, recently violent crime has been trending upwards among women, particularly women of color. Accessible new media opens up a space for a larger diversity of voices than the traditional white, patriarchal media elite (Atton, 2002; Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Berry, 2006; Sterne, Morris, Baker, & Freire, 2008). However, Internet true crime has remained stagnant in its portrayal of victims and perpetrators of violent crime (Murley, 2008).

The genre has repeatedly been derided for its supposed negative effects on readers. According to Gerbner’s cultivation theory (1967), true crime has the possibility to produce “mean world syndrome” amongst its listeners, increasing the fear of violent crime. However, many studies which look to amplify the voice of the audience itself point to the myriad positive uses of true crime including as a pedagogical tool and a medium through which to narrativize and even laugh at trauma (Browder, 2006; Vicary & Fraley, 2010).

### *Research Questions*

*RQ 1:* How does MFM reinforce and/or challenge the traditional true crime narrative?

*RQ 1A:* How do true crime, new media, feminism, and comedy intersect to create a unique space for MFM?

*RQ 1B:* What discourse does MFM perpetuate about gender, class, ability, and race?

*RQ 1C:* Does MFM create the therapeutic and pedagogical platform that scholars have attributed to the true crime genre?

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper is designed as a single, holistic case study allowing in depth focus on one specific “complex social phenomenon” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). In their specificity case studies look to make sense of a social phenomenon in its surrounding context (Yin, 2009). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) bridges the gap between micro and macro social discourse in a way that allows connections to be made between a podcast produced out of the living room of a little known former Cooking Channel star and the wider world of mental health advocacy, legal justice, systemic racism, and gender politics (Van Dijk, 2005). Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) in particular uncovers subtly gendered discourse in order to tease out underlying power structures, which lead to material consequences for people of all genders (Lazar, 2010). Both CDA and FCDA deal explicitly with the ways in which power is produced and perpetuated through talk. This approach provides a unique toolkit with which to mine the informal conversation of MFM for perpetuations and subversions of established power dynamics.

I will also approach this study through Stuart Hall’s “Encoding/Decoding” (1973). Hall argues that the encoding of meaning into a text is a “determinate moment” (p. 52). Producers “code” a text with a “preferred meaning,” or the intended message of a text. The moment of producing a media text and its meaning is informed by social, cultural, and economic factors that reveal power relations veiled behind strategic messaging (Hall, 1973). A combination of (F)CDA and Hall’s “Encoding/Decoding” will allow me to conceive of MFM as a determinately produced artifact as well as a force

contributing to a larger discourse surrounding gender, comedy, social justice, race, class, and mental health.

Heather McIntosh and Lisa Cuklanz (2014) define feminist media research (FMR) by four attributes. It is 1) interdisciplinary in its work across multiple disciplines, 2) collaborative in that researchers often work together, 3) self reflexive as researchers maintain a constant awareness of how their own beliefs and values may influence their work, and 4) politically engaged wherein motivations for research extend beyond personal enlightenment and instead work to incite social and political change (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014). FMR focuses particularly on discourse. Feminist media researchers analyze patterns that occur in media texts to understand “how power operates through ideas and representations” (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014). They look for patterns in representations of gender to understand naturalized meanings, which help to construct cultural ideologies (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014). While feminist media researchers pay particular attention to gender, overall they focus on how gender constructs intersect with race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality as well (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014).

While FMR is concerned with the historical perpetuation of the inequality of power among gender, it also looks to understand how power dynamics may be changing as revealed by certain media texts (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014). As part of its responsibility towards encouraging political and social justice, FMR criticizes media that upholds the status quo and provides literature, which can become inspiration for new forms of media that challenge patriarchal ideologies (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014; Lazar, 2007).

For this project I analyzed 10 episodes of MFM including the first five episodes and what were the latest five episodes at the time I began transcription. I chose to analyze these 10 episodes in particular because they would reveal the evolution or consistency in the podcast's messaging and format over its 65-episode span. I partially transcribed each episode and coded excerpts of the hosts' conversations according to the following key:

1. Class and criminal offense (CCO) - conversation referring to the socioeconomic status of an offender
2. Class and victimhood (CV) - conversation referring to the socio-economic status of a victim
3. Gendering audience (GA) - conversation referring to the gender of the podcast's audience
4. Gendered comedy (GC) - exchanges which exhibit gendered comedic traits as outlined in the Chapter II
5. Gender and criminal offense (GCC) - conversation referring to the gender of an offender
6. Gender and victimhood (GV) - conversation referring to the gender of a victim
7. Feminism (F) - conversation that reflects feminist ideology
8. Feminist methodology (FM) - conversation referring to the hosts use of feminist research methodology in the construction and maintenance of their podcast
9. Feminine space (FS) - conversation constructing the space of the podcast as feminine in its adherence to patriarchal ideologies of gender
10. Feminist space (FMS) - conversation constructing the space of the podcast according to feminist ideology

11. Justice system (JS) - conversation referring to the United State's criminal justice system
12. Media convergence (MC) - conversation referring to media outside of the podcast itself
13. Mental health and criminal offense (MHCO) - conversation referring to the mental status of offenders
14. Mental health and healing (MHH) - conversation referring to therapy and other forms of mental health healing practices
15. Mental health and victimhood (MHV) - conversation referring to the mental status of victims
16. Participatory media culture (PMC) - conversation referring to fans' participation in the podcast's various Web 2.0 iterations
17. Race and criminal offense (RCO) - conversation referring to the race of an offender
18. Race and victimhood (RV) - conversation referring to the race of a victim
19. Reasons for listening (RL) - conversation referring to the hosts' or listeners' reasons for listening to the podcast
20. Taboo (TB) - conversation referring to the taboo nature of the true crime genre and the consumption of it
21. Trauma (T) - conversation referring to traumatic situations that the hosts have experienced themselves or explicit conversation about traumatic experiences in their stories

- 22. True crime genre (TCG) - conversation referring explicitly to the nature of the true crime genre
- 23. True crime healing (TCH) - conversation referring to the healing capabilities of consuming true crime
- 24. True crime pedagogy (TCP) - conversation referring to the lessons taught by true crime stories
- 25. User generated content (UGC) - conversation referring to content that listeners of the podcasts have produced

Consistent with the tenets of (F)CDA, after coding data according to the above key I looked for patterns and inconsistencies across each category. (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014) Finding patterns, for example, across excerpts of conversation about gender and victimhood allowed me to understand how both patriarchal and feminist ideologies of gender play into the hosts' construction of narratives about victims and survivors of violent crimes.

My particular interest in MFM is not unbiased. I started listening to the podcast about a year and a half ago when a friend recommended it to me. At first, I skipped over the sometimes nearly hour-long chitchats that Karen and Georgia had before each podcast so that I could get straight to the murder parts. Over time, however, I began to appreciate the mundanity of their conversations perhaps even more than the murder narratives themselves. I felt as if I was part of the conversation, sitting on Georgia's comfy couches and laughing along with them. I appreciated their openness and honesty about mental health. Their ability to make light out of a life long fear of violent crime allowed me to laugh about it, too and even encouraged me to seek out therapy myself. I

own MFM merchandise, and when I speak about the podcast to others I refer to them as Karen and Georgia, as I will do throughout this thesis. I follow MFM on Instagram and Facebook. I once even asked my boyfriend, “Do you think I’m a Karen or a Georgia?” A Karen, we decided. We’re both Taurus’s, after all. The idea for this paper stemmed out of conversations about the podcast I had with my boyfriend over long-distance FaceTime conversations and during slightly awkward lunch conversations with friends about how listening to stories about murder actually helps to alleviate my anxiety and depression.

However, my love for the podcast comes with deep criticisms. I often hear things on the show (completely unrelated to murder) that make me cringe. The hosts’ relationship to feminism is complicated at best. As a runner, I am particularly put off by what feels like an incessant commentary on the stupidity of running alone. I often feel as if the podcast puts too much onus on women to keep themselves safe, and not enough blame on men who commit violent crimes. Sometimes, I even feel like their morbid humor crosses a line. However, these qualms don’t stop me from eagerly tuning in every week for a new episode.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CREATING A FEMININE AND FEMINIST SPACE**

The idea of the “public” versus the “private” sphere has long distinguished the gender roles of men and women (Rosaldo, 1974; Ortner, 1974). Men, associated with the public sphere, hold the power to produce meaning and the very formation of society (Ortner, 1974). Women, associated with the private sphere, are confined to the home where they are to perform domestic labor including child rearing, meal preparation, and cleaning (Ortner, 1974). While men are encouraged to be pro-social networkers and communicators, women are barred from forming meaningful relationships (Rosaldo, 1974; Ortner, 1974). In order to discombobulate this oppressive distinction, Michelle Rosaldo (1974) suggests, “Women may enter the public world or men may enter the home” (p. 36). But what if the home itself enters the public world?

MFM hosts Karen and Georgia create and broadcast a domestic space. The hosts almost always record their podcast from Georgia’s cozy living room. In the very first episode, Georgia begins by inviting listeners to share in this intimate living room space, saying, “Let’s get cozy and comfy and cuddle up and talk about murder.” Until the hosts enlisted the help of their technologically inclined friend, Steven Ray Morris, the podcast’s audio displayed the quaint imperfections of a homemade production. Each aspiration was perfectly captured in a cringe worthy “puff” on the microphones, and, for the first few episodes, listeners were forced to endure the sounds of leather couches squeaking unbearably each time Karen or Georgia decide to shift positions. As the podcast progressed the audio became more professionally produced. However, it has yet to lose the cozy, homey air established from the beginning. Listeners can still hear the

frantic “meow’s of Georgia’s cats, Elvis and Mimi, who make an appearance in almost every episode, Georgia often talks about her proclivity towards “house dresses” instead of jeans or bras, and listeners regularly hear the comforting tinkling of ice cubes against a glass of whiskey as the hosts settle in to tell their stories.

At times their language and humor works to situate listeners in a very gendered space. When Karen and Georgia end up telling two similar murder stories Georgia remarks:

Georgia: It's like our periods are synced, but our murders are synced instead.

Karen and Georgia: *Laugh*

Karen: It's all coming together in the red tent, Steven!

Georgia: Yeah. Steven's writing this one down cuz he's blushing so hard.

Karen and Georgia: *Laugh*

Karen: He loves a good period joke!

Georgia: Sisters. Sisters.

Karen: Sisters. (Episode 65)

Separation of the public and private sphere has forced women to keep quiet about their bodily functions, making menstruation an ultimate taboo (Ortner, 1974). Though this commentary physically takes place in the privacy of Georgia’s living room, the hosts broadcast their talk about menstruation into the public sphere. Karen and Georgia use their male audio technician, Steven, as a representative of the patriarchal forces that be, cowed by their brazen discussion of their periods.

Like the living room platform, the new media platform of the podcast genders the space. Web 2.0 participation, interactivity and user generated content (UGC) mirror feminist research methods (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Through “hometown murder minisodes,” “corrections corner,” interactivity with fans, and their promotion of UGC on social media, MFM encourages a collaborative epistemological approach.

Beginning in Episode 4, Karen and Georgia encourage listeners to write emails to them about their “hometown murder,” or murders that happened in their hometown. For the first few episode, the hosts chose one or two hometown murders from their rapidly growing inbox to read on the podcast. Eventually, they had so many to choose from that they decided to record special “minisodes,” or mini episodes devoted specifically to the reading of fan’s emails.

Almost every week, Karen and Georgia devote time to what they call “corrections corner,” where they address corrections or concerns from fans. The idea to start the corrections corner arose organically in Episode 1:

Karen: How ‘bout we have a whole segment that’s just like, “corrections.” *Laughs*  
Georgia: Corrections! How ‘bout we have like a supplement to our podcast of just like corrections every week.

Karen: Because my passion is for the act, and for like specific stories within it, but like I’ll always get the numbers wrong or the years wrong.

Since then, corrections corner has been a vibrant element of the podcast. The hosts not only correct themselves on details they may have missed (or blown wildly out of proportion), but they also incorporate fans’ voices into the production, giving them agency over the final product. The hosts’ inclusion of UGC promotes collaborative meaning making and knowledge production common to feminist research methodology which values research participants as co-producers of the final product. (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014) In the case of MFM, Karen and Georgia may be the lead writers, but fans are their co-researchers, producing the show alongside the hosts. Their intentional incorporation the beliefs, values, and work of fans is reminiscent of feminist research methodology which is collaborative in its production of knowledge and self-reflexive as

feminist researchers look to understand ways that their own biases may influence the work they produce (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014).

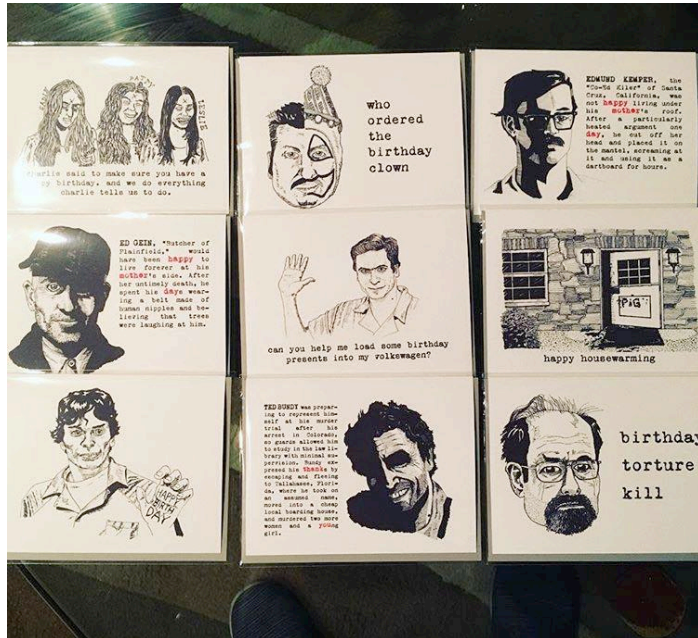
Web 2.0 sites including Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook provide accessible platforms for fans to interact both with each other and with the hosts. Georgia in particular, as the curator of the podcast's Instagram account, encourages artistic creativity among fans who share their productions on social media, send them to Karen and Georgia as gifts, or even profit from them on host sites like Etsy. UGC re-posted by Georgia makes up the large majority of MFM's Instagram page and includes anything from memes of the hosts' quotes, to drawings, to MFM inspired tattoos.



Crafting allows fans to express their own interpretations of Karen and Georgia's words, but it also allows them to participate in the uniquely comedic true crime discourse that the podcast perpetuates. Though the representation of the likeness of murderers is rare compared to the depictions of MFM hosts themselves, the Instagram post below demonstrates a fan's re-interpretation of discourse about serial killers. Each print includes

the image of an infamous serial killer reinterpreted into a witty greeting card message.

The top middle card, for example, depicts John Wayne Gacy, a serial killer of young boys who worked as a children's birthday party clown.



In episode 63 Karen and Georgia discuss a gift they received in the mail:

Georgia: Fuck man we're gonna need to post this [on social media], but, like we got this like gift once and it was a box and there was like this like crocheted belt in it and we were like, "okay, weird yarn crocheted belt."

Karen: Was that in Oakland? I think it was the Oakland show.

Georgia: No, no, no. It was sent here.

Karen: Oh sent, okay.

Georgia: Yeah because then you guys left, and I went to take a photo of it and as I'm looking through the lens I realize that it's a crocheted nipple belt.

Karen and Georgia: *Laugh*

Georgia: And it's like every different color nipples, like different races of nipples. And it's- and I just lost my mind in like joy of like how creative- like that's the description of murderinos is like- our listeners- is someone crocheted a fucking multicultural nipple belt.

K: A nipple belt giving Ed Gein a shout out (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017).

Ed Gein (the real life inspiration for Hitchcock's 1960 film, *Psycho*) was a serial killer who mutilated his victims and used their body parts to create trophies. Through the act of crafting and via Karen and Georgia's comedic discourse, the "nipple belt" turns

from a sickening representation of violence and sexual sadism to a multi-ethnic, feminine artifact used to poke fun at a notorious serial killer. David Schmid (2005) argues that perpetuating true crime discourse and other representations of serial killers contributes to their distasteful “celebrity” status. However, what the fans appears to be doing here is transforming a threatening individual who represents the absolute worst of a patriarchal culture into objects to be laughed at, thus neutralizing their threat.

Additionally, new media democratizes access to media production, releasing producers from corporate ties (Berry, 2006; Flew, 2014). It is in this climate that two women could laugh their way into a true crime podcast. The separation from strict corporate entities allows the hosts to explore and capitalize upon feminine qualities traditionally stigmatized in radio. On a 2015 episode of NPR’s podcast, *Fresh Air*, host Terry Gross interviewed three women about feminine vocal traits considered “negative” in the industry. Journalist and podcast host, Jessica Grose, Professor of Linguistics, Penny Eckert, and Linguistic Pathologist, Susan Sankin, argue over the problematization of upspeak (the tendency for women to raise their pitch at the end of sentences leading to a question intonation) and vocal fry (a lowering in pitch that results in a creaking sound). Sankin argues that upspeak represents a feminine lack of confidence and questioning of self and that vocal fry can cause long term damage to vocal chords. She believes that these two characteristics should thus be eradicated in women’s speech. Grose and Eckert, on the other hand, believe that though vocal fry may represent women’s assimilation into male dominated industries as they attempt to gain authority by sounding more like men and though upspeak may stem from a history of self-consciousness in women, ultimately it is unjust to police women’s voices so diligently. This policing creates a double standard

that requires women to be feminine but not too feminine and authoritative but not masculine. Forcing women to remove upspeak and vocal fry from their register erases their vocal personalities and asserts that feminine vocal traits cannot be “professional” (Gross, 2015).

Both Karen and Georgia exhibit upspeak and vocal fry throughout the podcast. Without institutional policing of their voices, they even use these two traits to brand themselves. Karen, whose duskier tone distinguishes her from Georgia’s girly pitch, consistently descends into the fry as she speaks pedagogically to listeners. Adopting the authoritative tone gives her the air of a wise old mother beginning a lecture as she says with her characteristic creak, “Look, here’s the thing...” Georgia, on the other hand, is prone to upspeak and constant high-pitched exclamations of “Oh my God!” She has had moments of self-reflexivity about her feminine tone. One of her constant refrains, “I’m sorry,” which she uses before introducing a point of criticism, has been memorialized in the below fan art which illustrates her pitch. Instead of policing her tone, however, fans celebrate her inherently feminine mode of expression and Georgia continues to use her signature phrase, even exaggerating it.



The new media platform of the show also defines how MFM presents itself in the commodity marketplace. Each episode includes up to three advertisements read by Karen and Georgia themselves. Their most frequent ads are for Thredup.com, an online consignment shop, Texture, a magazine app where for which Karen and Georgia mention mostly female gendered reading material, and ESalon.com, a hair coloring website that helps women choose their desired hair color and sends them pre-mixed pigments. Though the ads are clearly written by the companies themselves, Karen and Georgia have leeway to tailor the ads to their particular brand of humor:

Georgia: Hey Karen, how hard is it for you to find the right color for your hair?

Karen: Well, you can see my hair so I don't think I have to answer that question.

Georgia: You know why. Because hair salons are so expensive and time consuming and drugstore box brands suck.

Karen: They really suck and they make your hair look like s-h-i-i-i-i-t.

Georgia: But ESalon offer is professional grade completely personalized hair color created just for you and delivered right to your door.

Karen: It's true your unique ESalon color gets shipped quickly. Oh did I go into the middle of the story?

Georgia: Get it.

Karen: It starts like this, with Esalon you fill out a hair questionnaire. *Laughs* One of my favorite things to do. You upload a photo of yourself. Fun. Make duck lips.



Georgia: *Laughs*

Karen: Your personal colorist formulates your individually blended color from over 15000 pigments.

Georgia: Too many!

Karen: Who doesn't want stuff like that? No she wants to it's her favorite thing to do.

Georgia: One would think that's too many. However, it's not.

Karen: Then you have a quality salon personal touch right at your fingertips.

Georgia: Go to [Esalon.com/murder](http://Esalon.com/murder) and you'll get 50 percent off your first order.

Karen: That's just \$10 for your personalized hair color. Get 50 percent off your first box at [Salon.com/slashmurder](http://Salon.com/slashmurder) now (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 18).

Karen and Georgia's playful improvisation reveals how they brand themselves as both a feminine and feminist commodity. ESalon sells beautification supplies, which promote patriarchal ideals of feminine beauty. Karen subtly pokes fun at the company's seemingly complex process of finding the "perfect" hair color as she sarcastically asserts that filling out hair questionnaires is her "favorite thing to do." However, women (even feminist women) can take pleasure in processes of beautification (Cahill, 2003). Thus, the hosts' acceptance of ESalon's sponsorship along with their subtle criticisms of the beauty supply company paint a complex picture of their feminist brand. They both support beautification and highlight its absurdity.

The MFM merchandise website reveals a similarly conflicted brand. The website sells T-shirts, mugs, pillows, hats, phone cases, tote bags, and prints with ten of their podcast quotes turned slogans. Four of the slogans in particular reveal a mixture of feminist and not so feminist discourse: "sweet baby angel," "toxic masculinity ruins the party again," "fuck politeness," and "stay sexy, don't get murdered."

"Sweet baby angel" is a phrase that Georgia repeatedly uses to refer to female victims throughout the podcast. The term represents a colloquial metonym for true crime's construction of the "ideal victim" who is a young, white, middle to upper-middle

class, cisnormative woman who demonstrate adherence to patriarchal ideals of femininity. “Toxic masculinity ruins the party once again” refers to the hypermasculine traits and values of offenders that lead them to commit violent crimes against women. This phrase in particular performs a feminist critique of systemic and ideological violence against women. “Fuck politeness,” as will be further discussed below, tells women that they do not need to comply to patriarchal standards of female comportment that leave them vulnerable to be taken advantage of by men who wish to do them harm. Finally, “stay sexy, don’t get murdered” is the most popular of the slogans. At the end of every episode one host says, “Stay sexy,” and the other one finishes, “Don’t get murdered.” At live recordings the audience even chimes in. This mantra, which organically came to being at the end of Episode 6, reflects the podcast’s conflicted relationship with feminism. It has certainly become a rallying cry for murderinos everywhere, but it also reflects a pedagogical tendency of the show to place an onus on women to not “get murdered.” It speaks specifically to women in, perhaps, a tongue in cheek fashion mimicking a patriarchal society that demands high standards of sex appeal and beauty from women while also blaming them for “sexy” attire, which lures potentially vicious men towards them. The hosts repeat these slogans throughout the show reminding listeners of their conservative feminist pedagogical messages. Karen and Georgia constantly remind listeners of a patriarchal societal structure which should be rallied against while simultaneously telling them that it is their own behavior (should they choose not to “fuck politeness”) which dictates whether or not they end up dead.

MFM advertisements and merchandise also reveals much about the podcast’s imagined audience. The majority of its sponsors are companies catering to a female

market. The sponsors who don't cater to women specifically -Me Undies, Texture, and Audible- still offer products for all genders. The advertisements also speak to a particular class of women who have enough leisure time to spend reading magazines or listening to audiobooks, but still perhaps need to shop for clothes at thrift store prices. According to their advertisements, MFM's imagined audience is decidedly middle class. The slogans on the MFM merchandise listed above also speak to and about women. Women are "sweet baby angels," women bear the oppression of "toxic masculinity," women should revolt against a society that demands their politeness, and women should "stay sexy." Though it is difficult to discover much information about race from MFM's advertisements or merchandise, their particular brand of feminism seems to speak to the narrowly defined audience of second wave feminist who are white, middle to upper-middle class, cisnormative women (Evans, 2013; Gurney, 2015).

Convergence culture and Web 2.0 platforms allow the hosts to engage easily with listeners in order to co-produce knowledge (Jenkins, 2006). Podcasters engage more "authentically" with audience members via multiple social networking platforms and even in live shows (Edmond, 2014). Speech about taboo encourages an authentic, intimate atmosphere and strengthens MFM's community bonds. With their ideal audience in mind, Karen and Georgia create a discourse which focuses on building strong community bonds through discussion about their shared marginalization as an audience. In the very first episode, Karen speaks about her insecurity as a fan of true crime and how she was surprised to find that her sister's best friend is also a fan. Karen talks about a moment her sister's friend revealed to her, "Oh my God I love serial killers."

Karen: She was always the prissy girl and like the- or I mean, not prissy but just- I just thought I was so weird and perverted my whole life for loving this topic so much.

Georgia: And you can't tell anyone because they're going to think you're psychotic or like into murder, which you're not, you're just like fascinated-

Karen: By the idea- the whole concept.

Georgia: Right.

Karen: So that was awesome (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016).

Similarly, the hosts begin Episode 5 saying:

Karen: We're here to talk about crime and punishment and all the things that we like, uh, that a lot of people really don't.

Georgia: Well it turns out a lot of people- I feel like so many people are emailing us and being like "thank you."

Karen: That they do.

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: Yeah.

Georgia: And, "I'm always too embarrassed to talk about it with anyone."

Karen: Do you think even like, even grammar school teachers and even cheerleaders have these feelings?

Georgia: Yeah. I think most women like to talk about murder.

Karen: Yeah.

Georgia: Yeah. And some dudes.

Karen: Some dudes, too (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016).

The concept of violence is intricately tied to gender (Browder 2006; Vicary & Fraley, 2010). Ideologically, men are powerful and aggressive. Violence is condoned and even encouraged among their gender. Women, however, are weak and passive. This naturalized ideology alienates women from partaking in violence or enjoying violent media, hence Karen's shock at her "prissy" friend's interest in the genre and her speculation that "cheerleaders" and "grammar school teachers," who inhabit feminine gendered occupations, might consume true crime as well. The hosts concession that "some dudes, too" may also consume murder narratives reveal the way that Karen and Georgia gender their audience throughout the show as primarily women. True crime, as opposed to war histories, is a female gendered form of violent media, and thus is

trivialized (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). That true crime is a primarily female gendered media pushes against naturalized ideas about gender and violence, thus offending a patriarchal system that suppresses women's interest in the subject. These reasons are why Karen and Georgia feel as if they need to repeatedly justify their interest in true crime.

Part of the way that Karen and Georgia have come to terms with their own interest in true crime is by comparing their feelings with their fans'. In episode 4 the hosts discuss fan's emails:

Georgia: So many people would be like, "I didn't- I was always so embarrassed that this was a thing that I was into." Which I'm like, "what? You gotta talk to everyone about it!

Karen: Well that was how I felt when I was younger.

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: That I was crazy or something.

Georgia: People would think that you wanted to murder people (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016).

Georgia quotes another fan who wrote in saying, "it isn't being disrespectful, and you aren't going to hell. We're just coping with a fucked up world in the best way we know how" (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 5). Together, they commiserate with fans about the oppressive force of a violent culture pared with a taboo which restricts discourse about this violent culture, causing them to develop a troubled sense of self and feel embarrassed, ashamed, or even insane (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 4).

Karen and Georgia paint fans as knowledgeable in-group. In Episode 3, Karen talks to Georgia about how she got deep into some Wikipedia pages about a murder one night saying:

Karen: There are not many friends I have that I can be like, "guess what, guess what about these children that were murdered in the late 70s." None till [sic] I met you.

Georgia: Yeah, we're the only people that won't text back, "are you okay? Are you doing okay?" (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016)

This kind of discourse perpetuates an idea of Karen and Georgia as “authentic outsiders” whose niche interests separate them from mainstream culture. Like the hosts, murderinos occupy a niche positionality and celebrate their secret trove of knowledge which sets them apart and even above the rest of society. The title, murderino is not given exclusively to fans of the podcast but extends to all people who have an interest in true crime. Though they may have never heard of MFM, those people are automatically included in the in-group. Whereas an interest in murder is viewed by society as an essentially anti-social trait, this discourse about community and interpersonal bonds perpetuates an idea of belonging based upon a love of true crime. Georgia, the curator of the MFM Facebook page, speaks about the Facebook group as being a place where murderinos can come together to speak about and bond over their similar interests and experiences with violent crime. Together, Karen, Georgia, and their fans celebrate the taboo legitimized by their growing numbers across social media.

Though MFM is primarily a pre-recorded podcast, the hosts often take the show on tour. The live shows offer another significant opportunity for community building among murderinos themselves and with the hosts. Like the Facebook page, live shows offer a unique space for murderinos to come together as a community. Karen and Georgia speak about a comment on the MFM Facebook page, which illuminates murderino community bonding. Karen quotes the Facebook commenter:

K: “Went to see MFM last night in Milwaukee. My friend and I went to get dinner beforehand and it was like murderinos descended on Milwaukee-”

G: Yay!

K: “It was the best ever. Basically everyone we passed I would whisper to my friend, ‘They’re totally here for the show, definitely a murderino.’ When we were at bars before and after you slowly watched groups growing larger and larger as separate groups would realize that we all were murderinos-”

G: Aw.

K: “and joined together. Why can't that be the normal bars scene?”

G: Aw.

K: That would be a dream. “Thank you Karen and Georgia and all-” I think it cuts off at the bottom. It says- I think it says “and all murderinos everywhere.”

G: Aw.

K: But I love that so much because actually we didn't create this community-

G: Yeah.

K: You guys have created it for yourselves and its- we're just up here kind of like *Laughs* reading these stories and recording these podcasts, but you guys are the boots on the ground that are like-

G: Yes.

K: Every time we have a VIP meet and greet after a show people will tell us, “I met them in line, I met- now I'm hanging out with that girl.”

G: Yeah.

K: Like it's the cutest thing in the world.

G: I think that's what the live shows have done probably the most for us is make us like actually see all of the these people who are like- the shows are so positive and I'm always like- people are like “I'm scared to go alone!” And it's like, “no you're going meet 100 fucking cool people that are your friends.”

K: Yeah.

G: It's just such a cool thing, and I'm, I'm- it's not- and it's not like they'll get together because of our podcast, they'll get together over their love of true crime, which we all felt so in dark about because you're not supposed to talk about it.

K: It's people I think that aren't really the types of people- like somebody like me who I'm not going to be the kind of person who's like, “hey what are you interested?”

G: Yeah, totally.

K: I'm always like, “mmm,” arms crossed, and I think when people- you know, I just a second ago said, “it's so cute,” and that's the worst- I hate that word. I don't know why I used it, because what it really is is a very empowering, cool-

G: Yeah.

K: Like it's almost like skipping over, it's almost like a weird tinder for friends where you don't have- where you go, “oh I know this person already.”

G: Yeah.

K: “I don't have to like make excuses or pretend I don't like a thing I like, I already have this thing in common and then we go from there,” which is very cool.

G: Yeah.

K: And it's just, um, to us it's just a- it's thrilling to be able to be a part of this thing that you guys are doing (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 65).

As explained by Karen and Georgia with the help of an anonymous fan, murderino bonds form over a shared interests in true crime which makes even strangers immediate friends.

Alienated from polite society because of their interest in true crime, they are subsequently empowered in finding a sympathetic community.

The live shows are also a platform where hosts Karen and Georgia finally meet their prolific fan base face to face. Despite the difference in venue, Karen and Georgia appeal to the same ideal audience, aligning themselves in the same conflicted feminist space somewhere between perpetuating patriarchal standards of femininity and rejecting patriarchal culture.

Appealing to true crime's traditionally majority female audience, Karen and Georgia model their outfits for the audience at every live show usually with a tongue-in-cheek catwalk. During the live episode at the Neptune Theater in Seattle, the hosts provide a lengthy commentary about their outfits that they had been wearing for the entire tour:

Georgia: These [stockings], I love them, they're going straight into the hotel room trash when I get home.

Karen: Yeah. It's all filth now. It's all ruined. This feels like a dress- when I first put it on the first night I was like, "I'm a gorgeous princess!" And tonight I'm like, "I feel like Harold's mother from *Harold and Maude*."

Audience: *Laughs*

Karen: It feels like gross polyester that an old bitch would wear.

Audience: *Laughs*

...

Karen: But-

Both: Pockets!

Karen: What?! [To spotlight] Find me, find me, find my light. Find me. Follow me. Now- come on. Do this with me light guy!

...

K: There I am!

Audience: *Cheering as Karen catwalks.*

...

Georgia: Yeah we should wear different dresses every night now.

Karen: I'm- how bout pants and old shirts.

Georgia: Fucking, let's just wear whatever we want.



Karen: I'm not sure. The dress thing may have been sarcastic at first, and then now we had to like weirdly commit to it like, "it's our tour and we have to be fancy in theaters."

...

Georgia: Ugh. I'm so relieved. I'm never wearing a bra again.

Audience: *Laughs*

...

Georgia: Has anyone ever thrown their bra into the audience and not the audience throwing their bra on to the stage?

Audience: *Cheers*

Karen: Maybe, I bet they have. Like uh-

Georgia: Who wants a fourteen-dollar Target bra that smells?

Karen: I also- you can tell it's the end of the tour because my fingernails look like the ones Katherine Martin saw in Buffalo Bill's well.

Audience: *Laughs*

Karen: Can you see them?

Georgia: Good fucking reference right there.

Karen: It's I don't know what I've been doing but literally it's like, I look like I've been trying to climb my way out of a murderer's basement.

...

Karen: Oh this is the other- I didn't start out on this tour wearing these shoes with the dress. That probably wouldn't be my first choice, but I was like-

Georgia: Oh yeah, you had heels on.

Karen: *In singing voice* Fuck it! I can't do it anymore.

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: I had like huge heels for a while.

Georgia: You had heels on.

Karen: What the- for who?

Audience: *Laughs*

Georgia: Fuck them.

Karen: What am I doing?

Georgia: No offense (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 61).

In their live episode at Revolution Hall in Portland they have a similar exchange:

Karen: Oh! Also, do you just want to take a quick shoe walk, because-

Audience: *Cheers*

Karen: They're so good. Just tell the people- work it, own it! That's why you're wearing them!

Georgia: I can walk in them! This is like the two times a year I wear heels, and it's an hour long. I wore these at my wedding last year! Was the last time I wore them.

Audience: *Cheers*

Georgia: Um, you fucking changed- you've just like given up.

K: I can't do-

Audience: *Laughs*

Georgia: No! I didn't mean it like that.  
 Karen: I can't do it anymore.  
 Georgia: I didn't mean it like that. She had heels on last night, and tonight it's clog night.  
 Karen: I wore heels and even those ones were like the kind you can play basketball in or whatever.  
 Audience: *Laughs*  
 Karen: they weren't like any kind of crazy heels  
 Georgia: Looks like a pump, feels like a sneaker.  
 Karen: Feels like a sneaker! But when I went to put them on tonight I was like, "but fuck that shit."  
 Audience: *Laughs and cheers*  
 ...  
 Georgia: You can't tell right now, but I did say "fuck it" to my spanx.  
 Karen: Oh really?  
 Audience: *Cheers*  
 Karen: Look at that woman she's free!  
 Georgia: Fuck it, fuck it.  
 Karen: She's free!  
 Georgia: Fuck it.  
 Karen: Fuck it all! (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 64)

Through these interactions with their audience, Karen and Georgia critique patriarchal standards of beauty through a gendered discourse on fashion. The exchanges show that the hosts simultaneously revel in their attire and disdain it. Karen exclaims that though her dress once made her feel beautiful, it now makes her feel like "an old bitch." After reveling in the one still redeeming quality of her dress, (its pockets) she satirizes an essentially patriarchal act used to judge women by their appearances- the catwalk. She does so to a cheering crowd of mostly women, applauding her vivacity and humor in the face of her self-consciousness.

Eventually, both Karen and Georgia decide to release themselves from constraining patriarchal standards of beauty, opting out of dresses and heels for "pants and old shirts" and clogs instead. When Georgia asks if anyone has "ever thrown their bra into the audience and not the audience throwing their bra on the stage," the bra

transforms from a patriarchal tool used to display women's breast into a feminist tool, which inverts a traditionally male idea of celebrity and power. Instead of representing an offering from the audience of the female body as a sexual object for consumption by the powerful, male celebrity, here the "smelly" bra represents a de-fetishized sacrifice of the final remnants of oppressive (and downright uncomfortable) patriarchal standards of beauty to the audience.

Women's fashion, bras, heels, and spanx in particular, are almost heavy handed allegories for patriarchy itself. They constrain women and restrict their mobility, making them inactive and in a constant state of uncomfortable recognition of their oppressed place in society. Though they are oft-fetishized tools of the patriarchy, these artifacts and discourse about these artifacts are inherently feminine. Karen and Georgia transform feminine discourse into a feminist one that says "fuck it all" to patriarchal standards for beauty and fashion.

During the same live episode from Revolution Hall Georgia, experiencing a runny nose from allergies, uses a tablecloth to blow her nose in lieu of a tissue. Reflection on this social faux pas leads Karen and Georgia to recognize their own mothers as avatars of patriarchal standards of beauty and female comportment.

Georgia: I just like can feel it in my heart like a sixth sense how mortified my mom is and it gives me life.

Audience: *Laughs*

Georgia: Like my mom can't handle me not standing up straight. She would be so mortified, and I fucking love it. It's like I live to embarrass my mom.

Karen: If you blew your nose on a tablecloth, you mean?

Georgia: If she knew that I did that, not even like at a restaurant real quick but like in front of a bunch of people, oh! She would die! Its great.

...

Karen: If my mom saw this tights, boot, clog combination, she would just be like "I don't know what you're doing or why you're still rebelling, but you need to figure it out."

Audience: *Laughs*

Georgia: I mean, you have lipstick on though, so-

Karen: I have lipstick on so I don't look like a corpse, which is what she would normally would accuse me of. "Oh honey, put some lipstick on. You look like a corpse."

Audience: *Laughs*

Georgia: Mmm. And then I'd scream at her "I'm never having babies," and she would just turn into dust and die.

Audience: *Laughs*

Karen: That's really- that really is like the fucking gauntlet to throw down in any fight with your mom. "I will not reproduce!" (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 64)

The hosts, specifically Georgia, take pleasure in contradicting their mothers' attempts at forcing them to assimilate into patriarchal society that requires them to be "beautiful" and "ladylike" in order to attract a man and ultimately to "reproduce." They offer up their mothers' patriarchal lessons and words of wisdom as outdated absurdity at which the audience is invited to laugh, thus robbing them of their didactic potential and criticizing them for their impotence. Karen and Georgia use a feminine discourse about clothing and arguments with their mothers over monitoring their appearance to create feminist humor which criticizes hegemonic ideals of gender, empowers women, and mock hegemonic masculinity inadvertently by mocking their mothers who act as avatars for patriarchal demands (Shifman & Lemish, 2011). This type of humor transfers over to their conversations about murderers. The same feminist tone and critique of patriarchal society frames their unique true crime discourse.

MFM consistently employs a feminist humor, which seeks to critique hegemonic masculinity and societal inequalities between men and women (Swink, 2017). This humor encourages an "us against them" theme pitting female listeners against male killers. In episode 61, a live episode at the Neptune in Seattle, Karen tells the story of

notorious serial killer, Ted Bundy. She first introduces Ted Bundy as young college co-ed with a failed relationship:

Karen: Stephanie [Brooks] was a beautiful girl from a wealthy California family. They dated for a year. Ted is way more into her than she is into him. And eventually she graduates. She moves back home to her parents' house in California and she breaks up with him. And she tells him, upon breaking up with him, that he's immature and he lacks ambition.

Georgia: Oof.

Karen: And I'm sure that that went over well with Ted.

Audience: *Laughs*

Karen: He's like, *[in strained voice]* "Thank you Stephanie. I appreciate your candor. And I'll take it into consideration. *[Groans]*"

Audience: *Laughs*

Georgia: "No ambition, eh?"

Karen: "Watch this!"

Audience: *Laughs*

...

Karen: So he comes on back from Seattle with a spring in his step, and a thirst for blood.

Audience: *Laughs*

Karen: So he returns from his trip, really knuckles down and becomes a big republican.

Audience: *Boos*

Georgia: Why is that the weirdest- That's like the weirdest twist for me. Oh! Huh.

Karen: Isn't that a fun twist? He was like, "I know what's going to impress Stephanie. I'm going to get into politics."

Audience: *Laughs*

Karen: "Watch me wear a red and white striped tie, Stephanie goddamnit."

Audience: *Laughs*

Karen: So he runs the Seattle campaign office for Nelson Rockefeller's presidential run. Who? I know.

Audience: *Laughs*

Karen: He did a great job.

Audience: *Laughs*

Karen: So then he returns to the University of Washington. He becomes a psychology major and an honors student and he meets a woman named Liz Kendall who then becomes his girlfriend. He graduates from UW in 1972 with a degree in psychology. And that summer he goes on a business trip to California and he meets up with Stephanie Brooks just to say *[in a pretending to be calm voice]*, "Hi. Hey, what's going on. I just want to check in and see how you are. Catch up. What have you been up to down here? What?"

Audience: *Laughs*

Karen: This time- oh I wrote "this time, as a motivated republican psychology grad student with some amazing sweaters."

Audience: *Laughs*

...

Karen : Then he decided to go to Salt Lake City, because he's going to teach that ex-girlfriend a thing or two.

Audience: *Laughs* (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 61).

It was this woman, Stephanie Brooks, that became the model for the women that Bundy chose to murder: slender, white, young women with long brown hair parted down the middle. Here, Karen mocks a number of hegemonically masculine traits that Bundy displays. She illuminates his fragile masculinity so harmed by Brook's rejection of him that he felt the need to symbolically murder her over and over again. The crowd laughs at the stories of how he desperately tried to impress her by involving himself in politics at which he failed. They laugh at his proclivity towards sweaters, a decidedly non-threatening choice of attire.

Similarly, in speaking about Earle Leonard Nelson, The Gorilla Killer, Karen and Georgia laugh at his hypermasculine display of aggression and sexuality:

Karen: Now his moody, angry periods are broken up by periods of mania in which he takes to walking on his hands or lifting heavy chairs with his teeth.

Georgia: Aaaah!

Karen: *Laughs*

Georgia: Can you imagine if you saw a fucking 11 year old lifting a fucking chair with his fucking teeth?

Karen: A little eleven-year-old. You're like, "Earle, please put that down. Earle sit down and eat your dinner."

Georgia: "Earle! Eat your peanut butter sandwich."

Karen: "You don't need to do that with the chair anymore." This is also back when everything was made of solid wood. It's a fucking oak chair.

Georgia: Oh, Earle.

Karen: He's picking it up with his teeth, cuz he's like "I gotta get this outta me!"

Georgia: Oh God.

Karen: It's quoted as saying- this is my favorite quote on Murderpedia about him, "as a young man, Nelson was a daydreamer and a compulsive masterbater."

Karen and Georgia: *Laugh*

Georgia: You have to pick one of those! You can't be both.

Karen: I think they go together nicely. Cuz it's like, whistling, hands in pockets-

Georgia: What is the nightmare equivalent of a daydream?

Karen: Um, a chronic masterbater?

Karen and Georgia: *Laugh* (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 62).

The hosts use humor in these instances to take jabs at hegemonic masculinity which blames women for men's shortcomings in dating and displays overt expressions of aggression either in response to women's rejection of men or for no reason at all. The act of laughing at these men dilutes their threat of danger and emasculates or even infantilizes them. Ultimately, this weakens their power to strike fear in a majority female audience of true crime fans even long after their death. Instead, they become approachable figures, which can be used as discursive tools for understanding and mocking a violent patriarchal culture. One of MFM's many catch phrases perfectly demonstrates their feminist comedic approach towards hegemonic masculinity: "Toxic masculinity ruins the party again."

While our society valorizes the masculine public sphere, it trivializes women's spaces and thus women's discourse. By bringing the living room into the public world, the hosts of MFM destabilize the oppressive distinction between the public and private. As an added jab, they often use this trivialized, feminine space to critique patriarchal society, turning the feminine space into a feminist one. Ultimately, in creating a publicized domestic space, through encouraging collaborative meaning making, creating social bonds through the audience's alienation from mainstream society, and the use of comedic gendered discourse to critique patriarchal standards of female comportment Karen and Georgia create a feminist space in MFM.

Karen's and Georgia's comedy which mocks both conceptual patriarchal standards of beauty as well as male embodiments of a violent patriarchal culture is feminist in its nature. It criticizes patriarchal ideology and hegemonic masculinity,

empowering women to resist uncomfortable beautification tools and to minimize serial killers' vitriol by laughing at them (Swink, 2017). Through both a discourse on fashion and on true crime, the hosts unite a historically and imagined female audience in resistance against patriarchy. Though MFM's feminist humor mocking of hegemonic masculinity is an important discourse for making public the structural and systemic oppression of women, it still perpetuates a very specific idea of the feminist audience. Karen and Georgia can only speak to their experiences as white, middle class, cisnormative women in America.

Ultimately Karen and Georgia are representatives of second wave feminism best exemplified by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* which helped to kick off the second wave feminist movement in the mid 1960s (Levine, 2015). This type of feminism focuses on the specific type of oppression faced by wives and mothers, or women who adhere strictly to normative (meaning white, cisnormative and middle to upper class) feminine standards (Friedan, 1963). Friedan called for equality for women through the workplace which would give women purpose outside of their identities as housewives (1963). However, Friedan's argument ignores the many women already in the workforce finding no equality there (Levine, 2015). She advocates for a workforce of women in creative, fulfilling careers and forgets the leagues of women whose class, ability, and/or race identities do not allow for such privileged approaches to work. *The Feminine Mystique* does not recognize the suffering of women outside of second wave feminism's narrow audience. Friedan's work, though an important contribution to Western feminism, worked to push minority women away from mainstream feminism (Levine, 2015).



MFM mirrors second wave feminism's narrow focus on the most privileged of women and eschews an intersectional approach which would allow the hosts to speak to an audience of different women oppressed in different ways. Exclusive second wave feminism and additional patriarchal vestiges of the true crime genre still cling to even MFM's re-interpretation of the genre. At the same time, however, other elements of the podcast's unique situation between true crime and comedy redeem it.

## CHAPTER V

### TRUE CRIME CHARACTERS

The true crime genre boasts a number of tried and true narrative devices including the “ideal victim” and the “socio-psychopath” (Murley, 2008). MFM pulls strongly from these tropes, but also adds new dimensions to the genre’s typical characters including the “ideal survivor,” the “worthy adversary,” and the “weasel.” Like most true crime, MFM presents a whitewashed image of violent crime. However, the hosts simultaneously perpetuate a discourse that is critical of racism and classism in the criminal justice system. Ideas of gender, class, ability, and race intersect to create a slightly altered true crime discourse, which both supports the true crime status quo and works against it.

In true crime narratives, women are almost always the victims of violent crime (Browder, 2006; Murley, 2008; Vicary & Fraley, 2010). These victims can’t be just any women, however, they must ascribe to particular archetypal characteristics. Demographically, they are young, white, middle to upper-middle class, cisnormative women (Murley, 2008). Writers of true crime tend to judge these women based on how well they ascribe to patriarchal ideals of femininity, often writing about their selflessness, kindness, and beauty. Ideal victims are at times painted as gullible and even responsible for their victimhood. Though MFM outwardly rejects patriarchal standards of femininity, they manage to perpetuate other stereotypical ideas of victimhood in subtler ways.

In Episode 5, Georgia tells the story of Martha Moxley, a teen found dead in a friend’s front front yard on Halloween day in 1975:

Georgia: She’s like a cute, pretty- it doesn’t matter she could be ugly. It’s still terrible, but she’s, you know, chill as fuck and so the person they thought-  
Karen: She looks like a girl that’s in a black and white picture in an 80’s yearbook.

Georgia: Totally.

Karen: She's like that perfect girl.

Georgia: Like the popular- but like she's also on student body, like she's popular and smart, like she's not mean, you know.

Karen: Right. Freckles. Genuine smile.

Georgia: Like she'd probably end up being like a, like a lawyer for like the ocean (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 5).

For a moment in Georgia's description of Moxley it seems as if Georgia will openly criticize the true crime genre's valuing of female victims based on patriarchal standards of beauty and comportment. However, the hosts go on to describe the victim well within the archetypical standards of true crime's "ideal victim" template as a pretty, selfless young woman who therefore deserves to be mourned. By saying, "she could be ugly," it seems as if Georgia means to imply that beauty does not determine the value of a victim's life. Instead, she decides to replace the judgment with the term "chill as fuck." Karen aids listeners to imagine her as the "perfect girl" from the high school yearbook, a place where young women traditionally gain status through looks alone. However, Moxley was above the high school popularity contest, they seem to imply. She instead embodied the age-old feminine double standard: pretty, of course, but kind, smart, and selfless, too.

The hosts offer a similar description of Mia Zapata, lead singer of a Seattle punk band called "The Gits:"

Georgia: Mia's described as funny and kind. She loved meeting new people, she helped friends recover from drug addiction, she took in homeless acquaintances, and she helped a lot of people through various crises. She was a really open and kind person. Everyone said she was really funny and always joking and shy but a really good friend (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 61).

When the hosts can't focus on the beauty of a particular victim, they weigh her by her kindness, a trait that they argue in other episodes often gets women killed. Unlike Moxley, Georgia focuses specifically on Zapata's character. Selflessness is an attribute

frequently focused upon by the true crime genre in setting up a victim's characteristics (Murley, 2008). As a tool of melodramatic storytelling, it canonizes the victim and creates a sense of tragedy over their deaths.

When they struggle to fit victims into a mold of kindness, they stretch to push her in. Karen describes Hollywood publicist, Ronni Chasen:

Karen: She was known for being brassy and unapologetically pushy. She just didn't give a shit-

Georgia: Fuck dude.

Karen: And she was also really honest. So she would tell people to their face, like she had a friend named Kathy Berlin who was a New York publicist and Kathy Berlin said, "I used to say that Ronni got half her pieces placed because she would- people would just say 'enough already.' Like they would just- she would just wear them down."

Georgia: Oh my God (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 65).

The beginning of Karen's explanation of Chasen characterizes her as a stereotypical "bitch," a power hungry, assertive woman married to her career with little interest in pleasing other people. Karen begins to backtrack:

Karen: So she was also known as being- people adored her obviously-

G: Yeah.

K: People like to talk about people being big assholes in this business, but in my opinion, especially for women, you can't be that big of an asshole and get by.

G: Right.

K: People have to love you and you have to have loyalty.

G: There has to be some charm thrown in there

K: There's got to be- yeah. You've got to build loyalty to be as successful as this woman was. And there's a story that someone told- someone who really loved her who said she got a lot of flack because she used to always take a doggy bag home no matter what fancy dinner she was at, no matter what fancy restaurant.

Everybody being- trying to be Hollywood, she'd always take her food home in a doggy bag, and so people would whisper, "Oh is she cheap, oh is she whatever."

G: Yeah

K: And what she actually did was she would take her food-

G: *Gasps*

K: her leftovers to her mom's house-

G: Aw.

K: so her mom could eat the fancy food that she was eating, and like she would share the Hollywood night with her mom

G: Aw.

K: Isn't that lovely?

G: That's so sweet (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 65).

Because Chasen displays near masculine tendencies of being commanding, career oriented, and pushy, Karen feels the need to balance out her masculine traits with feminine ones of selflessness, kindness, and likability. This type of discourse which judges multiple female victims primarily by their feminine traits perpetuates an idea that women who do not display these feminine traits are not worth of sympathy for they do not fulfill the archetype of the “ideal victim” whose innocence in the face of evil makes for a compelling narrative.

In episode 4, Georgia tells the story of Michelle Wallace, a “free spirited” female photographer leaving the Rocky Mountains after an outdoor adventure:

Georgia: She's leaving the Rocky Mountains, and she does the classic 1970's I want to get murdered move. Do you know what that is?

Karen: Is it hitchhiking?

Georgia: It's fucking hitchhikers. She fucking picks up hitchhikers.

Karen: Oh, she picks them up?

Georgia: She picks up two dudes.

Karen: *Gasps* Oh no! What? One girl alone picks up two dudes.

Georgia: What the fu- 70's and 80's they're going to fucking prison.

Karen: What did they look like, I wonder, that she was like “this is fine.”

Georgia: Yeah! I don't know.

Karen: Was one really short or something? (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 4)

Karen and Georgia despise hitchhiking. As apparent from the above transcript, they believe it is a sure-fire way for a woman to get *herself* killed. Here, the hosts perpetuate a historical discourse that puts the onus on women for preventing men's violence against them. This argument is reminiscent of the misogynist idea that women who dress non-conservatively are asking to be the victims of sexual assault. Throughout the podcast, Karen and Georgia also remind listeners to “stay out of the forest,” they have expressed

the sentiment that running alone is irresponsible a number of times, and their most recognizable slogan is “Stay sexy. Don’t get murdered,” which they remind fans of at the end of every episode and which has been turned into T-shirts, mugs, phone cases, and a number of other merchandise. In this particular transcript and with each one like it, Karen and Georgia also perpetuate the longstanding true crime image of the gullible female victim who, often because of her virtuous kindness or passivity, becomes the victim of violent crime.

However, MFM also takes a nuanced approach towards the ideal victim. Another one of Karen and Georgia’s favorite slogans is “Fuck politeness.” The hosts use this almost as much as they use “Stay sexy. Don’t get murdered” to remind fans that buying into patriarchal standards of feminine comportment is dangerous. “Fuck politeness” refers to the societal requirement that women be kind to strangers even against the instinctual imperative to flee or to fight back. Georgia uses this phrase during Karen’s story about one of Ted Bundy’s potential victims:

Karen: On November 8th, Carol DaRonch is leaving Fashion Place Mall in Murray when an Officer Roseland approaches her to tell her that her car has been broken into and that she needs to come with him to file a report.

Georgia: Uh uh. [As in “no.”]

Karen: So she goes to the car, she sees nothing’s missing, but he tells her she has to come to the station anyway. And then they get into his Volkswagen. You know-

Georgia: Oh, he didn’t have a police car?

Karen: The car that cops drive all the time. Gold Volkswagens.

Georgia: Oh man, fuck politeness (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 61).

Georgia laments the cultural imperative, which led DaRonch to take the fake police officer at his word. In fact, Bundy was notorious for playing a this type trick on many of his victims, taking advantage of women’s impetus towards kindness.

Sometimes he would pose as a disabled man trying to move boxes or groceries into his

car and ask for a young woman's help in order to lure her closer. Once, he asked three different women on the same day to help aid him in moving his sailboat off of its trailer. One agreed and met deathly circumstances. Another refused and survived. Karen and Georgia praised the survivor for her cunning and "fuck politeness" attitude.

"Fuck politeness," or even the sentiment of it, signifies a pedagogical moment in the podcast as does the above exchange about hitchhiking. At the same time that MFM perpetuates the onus on women to protect themselves from violent crimes instead of recognizing the culpability of offenders themselves it simultaneously empowers women by telling them that they do not need to adhere to patriarchal requirements of feminine comportment. "Fuck politeness" tells listeners that women aren't to be blamed for their ill informed behavior but that society and its sexist ideal of "politeness" is. "Fuck politeness" tells women that if a man asks for your help to load some boxes into his car trust your instincts and don't think twice about what the stranger may think of you. This sentiment speaks back to a tradition in true crime to blame women for their innocent gullibility. Instead, MFM personifies society's demand on women to constantly be kind and give themselves over to authority as a force almost as insidious as serial killers themselves.

This dual discourse of oppression and empowerment appears early on in the podcast when Georgia discussed her anxiety:

Georgia: Oh, I always know how I'm going to die in any room I'm in. In any situation in any room I'm in, I'm aware of how everyone in that room- we're all going to die. And so I am the one who's on edge and aware of it at all times.

Karen: Well that's good.

Georgia: That's not healthy.

Karen: Or does it keep you alive?

Georgia: That's true. You know how many weapon's I have on my fucking key chain? Two. I have two weapons.

Karen: What are they?

Georgia: One of them is pepper spray. One of them is that cool pointy eared cat thing that you can stick your fingers through and you stab people in the eye with the cat ears.

Karen: Oh nice!

Georgia: Have you seen that? It's like the cat ear defense key chain. Look it up. Get it. It's great.

Karen: Okay, I will (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 1).

This exchange represents the realistic nature of living as a woman in a patriarchal society.

While the onus on women to protect themselves does ignore the root of the violence issue, Georgia nonetheless finds empowerment in literally arming herself against patriarchal violence. Unlike the traditionally passive “ideal victim” of true crime past, Georgia paints herself as an active fighter.

MFM glorifies women who, even if they fall into a deadly trap, redeem themselves through survivorhood. The “ideal survivor” adds complexity to true crime’s “ideal victim.” None better represents this characteristic than Mary Vincent, herself. Vincent ran away from a tumultuous home in Las Vegas at the age of fifteen to spend time with her family in the San Francisco Bay area. Feeling homesick and wanting to escape from toxic relationship, she decided to make her way back home to Las Vegas in 1978. Hitchhiking in Berkeley, she was picked up by an older man, Lawrence Singleton, who convinced her that he only had room in his van for her and not her two other friends traveling with her. She gets in the van, and, exhausted from her travels, promptly falls asleep. When she wakes up she does not recognize where she is. As she’s about to flee, Singleton knocks her unconscious. He assaults her, and in the morning as she begs him to let her free, he severs both of her arms from the forearm down, throws her over a 30 foot ledge, and leaves her for dead.



Karen: So she's down in this fuckin' ravine, and she's laying there, and she's losing blood like crazy, and she wants to go to sleep. But she said that there is a voice in her head saying "You cannot go to sleep. You have to get up so they can catch this guy." So she puts her bloody stumps in the dirt and makes a mudpack. So she stops losing blood.

Georgia: Oh my God.

Georgia: Uh hu [as in "yes."] On both arms. And then she starts crawling back up the ravine. 30 feet. It takes her all night. Oh no, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. That was the morning. He dumped her over in the morning. So she crawls back up the ravine it takes her all day. She finally gets up to the top of the ravine and back onto the road at night, and then she starts walking. Naked, covered in blood, with two stump arms. She walked for three miles. The first car that came up was two dudes in a convertible and they saw her.

Georgia: No.

Karen: And they fucking sped away.

Eventually, a couple on their honeymoon picks Vincent up and rushes her to a hospital.

Karen: So she [Vincent] testifies against him in court.

Georgia: Get it girl.

Karen: With two prosthetic- her two prosthetic limbs on. She'd already been fitted for them. She was still a teenager.

Georgia: I mean that's- That is a hard thing to do on its own.

...

Karen: So she did eventually get married. She moved to Orange County. She has two sons, and she started the Mary Vincent foundation to help victims of traumatic crime.

Georgia: Oh, sweetie.

Karen: Yeah.

Georgia: Oh, that poor girl. Isn't it crazy that like she would have been better off stealing a car and getting a misdemeanor than than hitchhiking.

Karen: You can't trust old men that look like grandfathers.

Georgia: *Laughing* And here's another thing I was thinking about like when she had a bad feeling he stopped to pee and get out of the car. But the thing about that is it's like if you have a bad feeling do what you need to do and apologize for it later. Like steal the car and drive the fuck off. Apologize later if it turns out he wasn't going to kill you.

Karen: Right. Trust your gut.

Georgia: Yeah. If you have to blow some guy off at a bar because he's giving you the creeps, but you don't want to be rude. Blow him off and apologize later if it turns out that he wasn't a creep.

Karen: Because if he's not a creep it won't be a problem later.

Georgia: Exactly (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 18).

Vincent's story exemplifies the narrative of MFM's "ideal survivor." First, she does something that Karen and Georgia have warned against. In this case she hitchhiked. However, when the inevitable happens she becomes the primary agent of her own story and through physical and mental fortitude she survives. Stories of ideal survivors always end with the survivor going on to perform advocacy work, learning from her own experiences, and redeeming herself through a sense of selfless duty. Throughout the series, when Karen and Georgia tell stories of other survivors, they are often spoken about in the same celebratory tone. This tone marks a strong departure from traditional true crime, which uses women as plot devices and often paints them as gullible, passive instruments of their own fate. MFM, on the other hand, has a tendency of humanizing survivors of violent crime and reveling in their agency in narratives rather than being plot devices.

Georgia tells a similar story about Terri Jentz during a live episode. Jentz was attacked by a man with a hatchet in Cline Falls State Park in Oregon in the summer of 1977 when she was camping after a long day on a cycling trip. After recovering from the attack she finished her degree at Yale and actually returned to the town in which she was attacked to investigate and eventually solve her own case. Soon after:

Georgia: Terri worked with victims' advocates groups rights to change the statute of limitations in Oregon. It's eliminated in '96, so thank Terri among other people for that.

Karen: Wow!

Audience: *Cheers* (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 64).

Demographically, she is exactly like the "ideal victim." She's a young, pretty, middle to upper-middle class, cisnormative, white woman. Unlike the "ideal victim," however, she is judged by her strength, mental fortitude, and by her ability to stand up to

a patriarchal justice system and win. She may have fallen prey to the wiles and ways of murderous men at first, but her image as a champion for women's rights and generally a "bad-ass" lady more than make up for it later. The ideal survivor engages with her trauma in healthy and productive ways that allow her to re-integrate into society as a positive force.

But Jentz wasn't the only woman to be attacked in the park that evening. Sleeping next to her when the attack occurred was her friend who had taken the trip with her and who also survived. When Georgia tells Karen that this other woman fell out of touch with Terri and refused to tell her story publically, Karen lets slip a resigned, "Oh."

It is clear through their dialogue that Karen and Georgia prefer one type of survivor over another. Survivors who struggle to heal from their traumatic experiences make for far less interesting stories than the badass female heroines, Mary Vincent and Terri Jentz. Their compulsion to fit survivors into the "ideal" category shows when Karen and Georgia speculate about the outcome of Shasta Groene who survived abduction by a serial killer and sexual offender. They fantasize about what could be:

Karen: Cuz she's a survivor.

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: And she survived.

Georgia: And she has a story to tell, which I think she's now coming out and telling it.

Karen: I bet she is.

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: I bet-

Georgia: What a horror.

Karen: I bet she's doing amazing work. And that's, you know-

Georgia: There's no- I mean just to think of the nightmare she went through.

Karen: Yeah.

Georgia: As a survivor, she has to be a very strong person to be able to move forward, not on, but move forward in her life (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 64).

Though neither Karen nor Georgia know for certain whether Groene is “moving forward” or not, they nonetheless feel compelled to narrativize her as an ideal survivor. Though the construction of the ideal survivor is largely a feminist one in that it celebrates women’s strength and independence in the face of danger, the host’s refusal to acknowledge survivors who don’t fit into this category perpetuates ideas about who is worthy of listeners sympathy and who isn’t.

In MFM there are three types of criminal offenders, “worthy adversaries,” “weasels,” and gender traitors. These categorizations are primarily distinguished on the basis of gender. However, race, class, and ability play largely into their construction.

Voicing her frustration with cold cases that end up being committed by obvious suspects, Georgia remarks:

Georgia: It’s just such a bummer, too when the answer doesn’t make any sense. Like the answer’s kind of boring.

Karen: Yes.

Georgia: It’s like “God, that guy?” Like Ted Bundy was satisfying because it’s like he’s this diabolical, handsome, intelligent man. And it’s like okay, that’s a worthy adversary.

Karen: *Laughs*

Georgia: When it’s like some fucking church guy who works in the church office and like is married and really doesn’t like prostitutes, like what a bummer (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 1).

“Worthy adversaries” are men like Ted Bundy. They are intelligent, handsome, and kill without reason. They pose a threat to even the most knowledgeable murderinos, like Ann Rule the famed crime writer. When telling the story of Ted Bundy, Karen relays this quote from Rule:

Karen: Ann Rule had the best quote. She said, “People like Ted can fool you completely. I had been a cop, I had all that psychology, but his mask was perfect. I say that long acquaintance can help you know someone, but you can never really be sure.”

G: Eeeew. *Squeels* (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 61).

Worthy adversaries pose a real threat to women because they are nearly undetectable. Speaking of these types of killers as “worthy” puts potential victims and their killers on an equal playing field. Victims of serial killers like Bundy aren’t the passive gullible dupes that true crime often paints “idea victims” as. Instead, they were taken advantage of by an unknowable force. By painting the offenders as “worthy adversaries” the hosts add a modicum of empowerment and agency to the representation of their victims. In MFM, worthy adversaries are nearly always men leading to an “us against them” discourse in the podcast. When speaking about the threat posed by these types of killers, Karen and Georgia note:

Karen: I mean I feel like it really is the worst- child killers and rapists. That’s the devil walking Earth. I mean that’s real.

Georgia: It’s so insane. I can’t imagine. And I do it constantly. And I know that when I have kids I’m going to be the fucking worst parent. And I’m going to have *kids*, too. They’ve made us have to have multiple kids cuz one of them could get murdered, and then you don’t have any children! When I hear like a crime thing, I’m like, “oh that’s her only child? That sucks! You should have had a backup!”

Karen: Have at least 4.

Georgia: Because you just never know!

Karen: You need two normals, two alternates (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 1).

Thus, worthy adversaries are the ultimate concentration of a patriarchal system, which promotes violent misogyny. They threaten all women, everywhere, all the time simply by existing.

More often than not, Karen and Georgia paint worthy adversaries as socio-psychopaths. Georgia describes Earle Leonard Nelson, a serial killer nicknamed “The Gorilla Killer,” as an “Animal, monster, psychopath” (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 64). Over MFM’s many episodes during which the terms “psychopath” and “sociopath” are so freely sprinkled throughout their storytelling, Karen and Georgia have

received feedback from fans worried that this particular discourse so common throughout the history of true crime actually works to further marginalize developmentally disabled people from society. In speaking about Bundy, Karen notes:

Karen: It's also a tribute to his insane, like, whatever he was. I like to say- my favorite one to say is psychopath. But, who really knows what that means. Not me!

Georgia: Some people get offended.

Audience: *Laughter*

Karen: Some get offended, some just want me to be accurate.

Audience: *Laughter*

Karen: I think he was a sexual sadist psychopath.

Georgia: Yeah.

Audience: *Cheers*

Karen: [*To audience.*] You think so? (Hardstark & Kilgarriff, 2017, Episode 61)

Though Karen seems to recognize the effect her and Georgia's very public discourse could potentially have, this does not make them shy away from labeling whomever they want as a socio-psychopath. Though MFM takes a progressive approach towards mental health and healing for victims, survivors, and fans, it has a more conflicted relationship with mental health as it concerns the offenders they speak about. This conflicted narrative is especially apparent in their acknowledgement of Andre Rand, a serial killer popularized by the documentary, *Cropsey* (Zeman, 2009). His story takes place in the 1960s in Staten Island, New York after the recent shut down of Willowbrook State School, a large and dysfunctional institution for developmentally disabled children. Modern stories about Rand have an urban legend-esq feel to them, as Karen describes:

Karen: The story has all of the elements of murder, you know creeper urban legend story- everything I love. It's got a mental hospital, it's got the woods.

Georgia: It's almost like that's too much if someone had written this thing.

Karen: Yeah, it's like you can pick one or the other, but you can't have a mental hospital in the woods. That's crazy.

...

Karen: That's when the urban legend started where it was, "there's a mental patient that's still on the grounds, because there was a tunnel system underneath the hospital."

Georgia: *Gasps*

Karen: "And he was living in the tunnels, and at night he comes out and steals children."

As for Rand:

Karen: He's described in one of the pages that I read as "a mentally incompetent convicted child sex offender."

Georgia: That's fun.

Karen: So he's got it all (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 4).

On the one hand, Karen and Georgia frame Rand within a historically politically incorrect narrative that marginalizes developmentally disabled people, painting them as violent, deviant monsters who deserve to be alienated from the rest of "normal" society. He is the personification of the negative light that the terms "psychopath" and "sociopath" paint all developmentally disabled people. As it turns out, however, Rand was not even a patient at Willowbrook. He was a janitor.

Willowbrook was eventually closed down due to the negligent and abusive conditions under which patients were housed. Karen and Georgia discuss the injustice of mental health care at the time:

Karen: This is back when people used to dump their children.

Georgia: Totally.

Karen: And it didn't matter if they had Down Syndrome or if they were very, very- you know if there was something wrong with them-

Georgia: Or they had like Cerebral Palsy,-

Karen: Yes.

Georgia: and they would just be like "later days."

Karen: Tons of Cerebral Palsy kids were completely intelligent and one hundred percent there- just dumped. And so what ended up happening -of course because it's like a state funded hospital- is it's um, it's um, overflowing with patients.

What's the word I'm looking for? *Laughs*

Georgia: *Laughs* You got it, it's good, go with it.

Karen: Understaffed, overpopulated. And so they end up- a reporter finally goes in. And when we talked about it on the last episode I said something really grandiose like Robert Kennedy shut it down.

Georgia: I thought it was Geraldo Rivera.

Karen: Geraldo Rivera. So Kennedy saw it in the '68 and said, "this is a snake pit, this is a disgrace," and they started doing all these reviews, and what had happened was all these children being in this close proximity, they found out it was like, they were just in rooms, naked being hosed down. Horrible. There's not lighting. It's crazy. Bunch of them started getting Hepatitis-

Georgia: Oh fuck.

Karen: So then they had medical studies where they were testing Hepatitis on these children.

Georgia: Right. They were like, might as well do some scientific testing on these-

Karen: Exactly, and they're basically giving them all Hepatitis. They were getting it- it was- so anyway.

Georgia: Oye! (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 4)

In the above excerpt, the hosts decry the historically inhumane treatment of developmentally disabled citizens. Eventually the hosts discuss President Ronald Reagan's policies that lead to the untimely release of many patients in institutions for the developmentally disabled.

On the one hand, Karen and Georgia paint socio-psychopaths as deviant monsters who make up the stuff of nightmares and creepy urban legends. On the other hand, the hosts create a discourse that illuminates American society's marginalization of developmentally disabled people as an injustice. This injustice is ultimately a vicious circle where people who do not receive care end up as homeless or, because of systemic marginalization, as criminal offenders.

This conflicted discourse leads to ethical confusion among the hosts. In speaking about Earle Leonard Nelson, another serial killer who they've identified as a socio-psychopath, the hosts contemplate his history of traumatic brain injuries and syphilis:

Karen: His brain was just never not inflamed.

Georgia: And I almost feel bad for this guy.

Karen: Yes.



Georgia: 'Till I probably find out what he does.

Karen: Yeah you won't feel bad later. But you can definitely feel bad for ten-year-old Earle because he did not have it good (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 62).

What they seem to decide, as is the requisite of true crime (Murley, 2008), is that the ultimate blame for a killer's transgressions lies with them and them alone despite the unjust mental health care system which alienates them from the help they need in order to heal. The part of MFM discourse, which criminalizes developmentally disabled people plays into a long history of such criminalization in the media (Chaimowitz, 2012; Wilson, Nairn, Coverdale & Panapa, 1999). Prime time television often portrays developmentally disabled people as dangerous to themselves or others, leading to alienation from citizenship and society (Wilson, Nairn, Coverdale & Panapa, 1999; Parrot & Parrot, 2015). Though MFM empathizes with "innocent" developmentally disabled people such as the children in Willowbrook Hospital, the hosts ultimately work to further stigmatize developmentally disabled people in general as most mentions of developmentally disabled people focus on the socio-psychopath. In MFM the traditional construction of the socio-psychopath is re-imagined as the "worthy adversary." They are generally distanced from a discourse about disability and instead described as "animals" and "monsters" responsible for their own actions.

These ethical dilemmas also reveal the hosts' conflicted, gendered approach towards criminal justice. On the one hand, Karen and Georgia reinforce a traditionally masculine approach called the "justice perspective," which "draws attention to problems of inequality and oppression and holds up an ideal of reciprocal rights and equal respect for individuals" (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1994, p. 225). True crime unfolds in a history of this type of eye for an eye type of justice where perpetrators are caught and punished by

the full extent of the law (Browder, 2006). On the other hand, however, the hosts display a female gendered “care perspective” towards justice which “draws attention to problems of detachment or abandonment and holds up an ideal of attention and response to need” (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1994, p. 224-225). This perspective is apparent in the way that the hosts “almost feel bad for” Earle Leonard Nelson whose “brain was never not inflamed” (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 62).

The worthy adversary’s counterpart is the “weasel” who arises at the intersection of gender, race, and class. Weasels are sexually motivated white men who usually get away with murder or other violent offenses. What differentiates them from “worthy adversaries” is their good fortune, which is usually related to their white privilege and high socioeconomic status. Speaking about the murder of Martha Moxley, the hosts hone in on Michael Skakel, her convicted killer and the brother of Thomas Skakel, the young man Moxley was reported to have kissed the night of her murder.

Georgia: It’s just such a bummer because I think that why I don’t want him to be guilty is because he is such a fucking loser and such a little twerp that he doesn’t deserve- I want it to be more sensational, because she deserves to not have just been killed by-

Karen: By a weasel.

Georgia: this little jerking off little shit face.

Karen: Yeah, who is jealous of a thing. That’s like a friendzone murder. That’s what that is.

Georgia: Yeah, or like you-want-to-fuck-my-brother-and-not-me murder (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 5).

Georgia implies that Moxley, the perfect girl from the 1980’s yearbook, “deserves” to have been killed by someone who poses more of a threat, perhaps a worthy adversary like Ted Bundy. Instead, it was Skakel, the infantilized teenage twerp who somehow manages to overcome her.

Shortly after Skakel's conviction a cousin of basketball star, Kobe Bryant, announced that it was not Skakel who murdered Moxley but a group of his friends from the Bronx who were intent on committing a random act of violence that evening. Karen and Georgia don't buy it. They compare the life experiences of a rich white teenager to that of poor Black teenagers:

Georgia: Rich, white, teen boys running amok that lived on their own. That sounds terrible.

Karen: Now am I wrong to assume that Kobe Bryant's cousin is Black? And that the kids coming in from whatever- did you say Brooklyn or the Bronx?

Georgia: The Bronx.

Karen: Coming in from the Bronx were Black?

Georgia: That's an assumption we could make.

Karen: I would think that the Greenwich, Connecticut cops would see three Black kids walking around on mischief night and at least ask a question.

Georgia: Yeah, totally.

Karen: If not harass the fuck out of them.

Georgia: Yeah (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 5).

Here, Karen points out the relative ease with which weasels can operate in society. The Black teenagers could not have committed the murder undetected because they live under constant authoritative scrutiny.

Karen: I think that the thing it comes down to with me with a lot of these stories is my irritation over the fact that people accept- kind like if you're a white guy wearing a button down oxford shirt, you can kind of do whatever the fuck you want.

Georgia: Totally.

Karen: And people will be like "Oh no, that nice boy down the street?" Like you can- you get to hide in plain sight with the camouflage and meanwhile be whatever, and people will not believe it. They'll immediately believe three black kids driving up from the Bronx to kill this one girl. (40)

...

Georgia: He [Skakel] didn't get arrested until 2002.

Karen: Oh, so this is crazy like white people justice where it's a rich guy who basically kind of did a symbolic time, and now they're faking out some black people to say, "Hey maybe we did it," and then his thing goes away.

Georgia: Probably (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 5).

Unlike the Black teens, weasels have the privilege of assumed innocence. Karen and Georgia's critique of a culture which turns their heads to white criminal activity illuminates what bell hooks called "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 1981), or the intersectional nature of power and oppression in American society which gives white upper class men the ability to oppress women, people of color, and otherwise marginalized groups of people. White supremacist capitalist patriarchy extends to law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Karen and Georgia critique white supremacist capitalist patriarchy by pointing out societal injustice through the construction of the weasel.

Karen tells the story of the Oakland County Child Killings and the child sex ring operating out of a Christian Boys' Camp on North Fox Island. She explains:

Karen: It turns out that the guy that owns the island is this multimillionaire. That when they bust it and they found out and whatever, they realize that this camp is- there's no church affiliation, there's no affiliation, it's just these- it's a pedophile ring that had also been operating in the really bad part of Detroit that was well known. Where like kids on the street- they would get kids and pay them and get them into that ring and pay them to have sex with them and it was just this whole huge ugly thing full on exploitation of poor children.

Georgia: Holy shit.

...

Karen: Those people all disappeared.

Georgia: *Gasps*

Karen: The guy that owned the island escaped to Europe.

Georgia: Holy shit.

Karen: Like flew, left the island, flew away and they just could find him or extradite him.

Georgia: Money.

Karen: Money (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 3).

In MFM, weasels kill not because they are socio-psychopaths or because they are particularly good at hiding in plain sight, but because they are well-connected beneficiaries of a corrupt justice system which protects privileged white men. Because

they are so privileged and thus never have their actions corrected by institutions of justice, they never learn about right and wrong the way that other people do. Talking about weasels is the only time that Karen and Georgia mention socioeconomic class as a predictor of criminal behavior. This mirrors a tradition of the true crime genre, which since the 1970s, has focused on patriarchal pillars of the community as representations of the evils of violent culture (Browder, 2006). This critique of white, upper class men also furthers the feminist message of the podcast, which looks to critique a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal society.

In MFM, murderers are rarely ever women. When female killers do crop up, it usually leads Karen and Georgia on an ethical exploration of what it means to be a woman who goes to directly against her “nature.” While discussing one of their favorite topics, hitchhiking, the hosts discuss the unfairness of women who take advantage of hitchhikers:

Georgia: It’s so scary because you think like you see a woman and you’re like, “I’m safe.” Like, let’s say for some reason I was hitchhiking which I would fucking never do because I’m terrified of murder. But, it happened that I was and a couple stopped. I would be like, “this is okay because the woman’s here. So he’s not going to murder me with his like wife or whatever” (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 3).

In a later episode, Karen and Georgia speak more specifically about Karla Homolka, the murderous companion of serial child killer Paul Bernardo.

Karen: Yes. That’s right. It’s the old trick of having a woman there.

Georgia: It’s so creepy.

Karen: It’s the worst. And also with little kids.

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: It’s so unfair. It’s just like it goes against everything your instincts would tell you.

Georgia: It’s a huge trick. Do you think that women- it’s more horrifying for women to kill children than for men? It’s- I feel like- is it-

Karen: I feel equally horrified at every story that I hear of people that think it's okay to kill children.

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: Or- it's like- that need. The- like a compulsion to kill children, there's something-

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: Just fucking ends it because there's something so wrong with you.

Georgia: I feel like what horrifies me more than the compulsion is the like- being okay with it. It's not even like- like she might not have had a compulsion to kill children, but she went along with it anyways. So that to me is even more depraved because it's not even this like addiction that you have.

Karen: She was doing it for her fucking boyfriend.

Georgia: Totally.

Karen: Which is the- I mean, you've known people who are like, "Now I'm into swing dancing."

Georgia: *Laughs*

Karen: And you're like, "That's so lame," but you never say anything.

Georgia: Right. She'll get over it.

Karen: This is like- yeah exactly. Just like, "We'll wait for this one to wind down and you'll hate him in eight months or whatever." But no, this is like- it's very extreme (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 62).

There are a number of reasons that Karen and Georgia are so sickened by female killers. Primarily, MFM promotes a vision of the world in which victims are nearly always either women or children. The discourse that they have created sets up an "us against them" narrative where women are "we" and male serial killers are "they." Thus, when a woman decides to kill another woman, she is a traitor in the battle of the sexes. Also, patriarchal standards of female comportment say that women are decidedly non-violent. Women are supposed to be passive and ultimately nurturing. They are supposed to be the givers of life, not the ones who have the power to take it away. Thus, when women kill children (or anyone for that matter) it goes sharply against their socially constructed nature. These stories also peak the hosts interest because "stories about women who kill children offer a way for women to comprehend the transgression of a primal taboo" (Murley, 2008, p.

153). Ultimately, Karen and Georgia's tendency to scrutinize female offenders even more than men is a decidedly sexist action.

Victims in MFM are rarely ever people of color. Throughout the ten episodes of MFM that were analyzed for this case study race is only mentioned in concert with victimhood a handful of times. However, two important instances of reflection on race and victimhood happen in Episodes 64 and 65 noting a potential transition in the podcast towards a more inclusive and social justice oriented discourse. In Episode 64, Karen tells the story of Bobby Jack Fowler known for his contribution to what has become known as the Highway of Tears murders.

Karen: Most of those murder are First Nation women, which is why no one ever hears about them. Because it's Native Ameri- sorry, Native Canadian, which they call First Nation women up there, and they get no press. Nobody talks about them and that's why they had to start- they started a task force in 2006 in Canada, because so many women, especially First Nation, were disappearing along highway 16, which cuts across British Columbia. It's an east west highway used by truckers and loggers, and so many women have disappeared off of this highway that they actually had to start a task force for it (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 64).

Unfortunately, however, this is the extent of Karen's discussion on racial injustice for First Nations women. The majority of this story was devoted to discussing the biography of Fowler and his white victims. In episode 65, however, Georgia tells the story of a woman name Mitrice Richardson, and her narrative quickly becomes a means by which to discuss the severe racial inequality in police treatment of citizens in L.A.. The story begins when Richardson is unable to pay for an \$80 meal at a restaurant in Malibu, California. The restaurant staff calls to report her to police, saying that they think she may have been on drugs.

Georgia: But Mitrice Richardson wasn't on drugs. She was a twenty-four-year-old smart and beautiful African American woman from south L.A.. She graduated

from California State University Fullerton with a Bachelor of Arts in psychology the year before, and at the time she worked as an administrative assistant at a freight company. But she wanted to work with children, and at the time she volunteered as a mentor for at risk children and worked with kids at a cheerleading camp (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 65).

Richardson offers the perfect entrance for MFM into story about racial injustice. She is Black, but she otherwise adheres perfectly to the template of the “ideal victim.”

Ironically, it is clear that Karen and Georgia recognize the criminal and judicial injustice that people of color face in North America, but, throughout the entirety of the podcast they have done almost nothing to correct a discourse, which marginalizes the very people they talk about.

After Richardson was arrested at the restaurant in Malibu, the Lost Hills Police impounded her car and took her back to a holding cell instead of expending the energy to commit her to a hospital where she could have been treated for the manic episode she was experiencing. After speaking with her mother who begged the police not to let Richardson out in the middle of the night without her possessions, the police did so anyway. Richardson was miles away from her car where police had left her jacket, purse, and phone. She was in an unknown area and clearly mentally distressed. When Richardson’s mother called the station in the morning to inquire about her daughter, they told her that they had released her in the early hours of the morning. When she tried to file a missing persons report, police told her to call back in two hours. Richardson was never found alive. Her mummified body was eventually discovered in the Lost Hills woods.

Karen and Georgia talk about the blatant injustice of the case:

Georgia: *Sighs* Lost Hills Police Department. Again, fancy pants police department and fancy pants part of Malibu, like really nice area. It's the same



station where Mel Gibson was taken after being pulled over for drunk driving and yelling anti-Semitic slurs.

Karen: Mhmm.

Georgia: Same station. But-

Karen: But they let him keep his purse.

Georgia: *Laughs* Well they escorted him from Lost Hills to his towed car that- cuz they treat famous and rich people- which is what they're neighborhood is-

Karen: and white people (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 65).

...

Georgia: Unfortunately, Mitrice didn't receive the same treatment as a famous asshole.

Karen illuminates the idea that Richardson's poor treatment was due expressly to her race. After finding Richardson's body, Lost Hills police shoddily airlifted her remains out of the potential crime scene. They did so against the express orders of the county coroner. Later, tapes were revealed of a Lost Hills police officer following Richardson as she left the police station that evening. No one was ever reprimanded for the blatant mishandling of the Richardson case.

Georgia: He [the author of the journalistic piece from which Georgia culls her information about this case] talks a lot about the LAPD corruption and why this could have taken place and the like rampant racism that was going on at the time to a point where you know the second in command is going to prison for 15 year because of corruption. So it's incredibly corrupt, there's like you know- rampant anti- rampant racism and so he tells- I don't talk about it a lot in this, but he tells background of why this is so obvious and you know it could have happened this way.

Karen: When you- and I think most people that are into true crime -watched the ESPN *30 by 30: OJ Simpson*, [sic] that part of the Daryl Gates era of the LAPD was so shocking and eye opening to me. And it going all the way back to the riots in the 60s, it's just so crazy how long this has been a humungous problem in Los Angeles that is never- that hasn't been solved or even really-

Georgia: Addressed really.

Karen: Addressed.

Georgia: No for sure, and it's not not happening any more. You know it's-

Karen: It hasn't changed at all.

Georgia: No.

Karen: No.

Georgia: It's just hidden better and you know we've put a Band-Aid over some of the things to make it look less horrifying, but it's still there.

Karen: well and also it's just the rationaliz- the justification of using the violence and the crime that happens- the day to day to then justify-

Georgia: Right.

Karen: Any behavior.

Georgia: Right.

Karen: On the part- I mean it's just- it sucks. I have a bunch of people that are police people in my family.

Georgia: Yeah, you do.

Karen: I'm not anti-police. It's down to the person though.

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: Especially in this day and age. It's down to the person because there's- because it's just such a- it's such a close, you know, like it's a frat basically.

Georgia: Well yeah, and in LA, and I'm sure in a lot of other cities, specifically the cards are stacked against you if you're not white and you don't have money.

Karen: Yes.

Georgia: And you're, you know. The cards are stacked against you. You're not- you don't start at zero sum at all.

Karen: Yes. Yeah.

Georgia: And I, yeah. I don't you know. I don't want to forget that as someone who lives here and knows that I'm fucking privileged as shit to be where I'm at-

Karen: Well also just we don't have to think about-

Georgia: Totally.

Karen: how bad it could be. I mean this is like, this is like saying you can't be mentally ill or you will just be almost literally thrown to the wolves. It's insanity. And what did happen to her at the police station?

Georgia: Yeah (Hardstark & Kilgarriff, 2017, Episode 65).

Here, Karen and Georgia recognize the historic and systemic injustice and racism of the LAPD, using Richardson's story to act as an exemplar to critique larger trends. This segment also includes a rare example of self-awareness when the hosts position themselves as privileged citizens attuned to the suffering of other groups of people outside of their limited middle class, white, cisnormative selves. Unfortunately, overall the podcast fails to incorporate that knowledge into a discourse that consistently seeks justice for women outside of their identity group. The hosts hardly mention race. It's a good sign that when race is mentioned, it is usually used to critique a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal system, but the ignorance of the many violent crimes against people

of color perpetuates a very limited discourse about who are the true victims of violent crimes and who deserves respect, sympathy, and interest.

The discussion of Richardson's case was a rare foray into the critique of systemic racism. MFM's more frequent critiques of the justice system usually express frustration over repeat offenders. The hosts often tell stories about serial killers or rapists who were arrested, tried, and convicted for previous crimes but were released back into society where they committed more violent crime. Talking about Andre Rand, the hosts say:

Karen: He get's sentenced to four years-

Georgia: Four years?

Karen: He only serves ten months.

Georgia: Ten months?!

Karen: *Laughs* You know, the classic scenario.

Georgia: For attempted child- I hate everything.

Karen: I know.

Georgia: This is why we have to do this podcast, because our fucking penal system blows.

Karen: Because we gotta talk about it. We're going to affect change-

Georgia: Oh clearly.

Karen: *Laughs* By laying on these couches.

Georgia: He would have gotten 11 months if it was today. Because of us (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 4).

Karen and Georgia also have similar discussions about Roy Melanson and Joseph Edward Duncan III in Episodes 4 and 63, respectively. They also speak about what they see as a too lax approach towards punishing rapists.

Georgia: The fucking penal system. Of all these stories of horrific things, I'm usually the most disturbed and disgusted by how little time people get for heinous- the crime.

Karen: Well when are rape and child molesting going to start being really seen as like these are people who should not be in- should not be getting out in 6 months?

Georgia: I don't know but when that happens they're going to stop putting a fucking statute of limitations on prosecuting people for rape.

Karen: Yeah.

Georgia: There's a statute of limitations-

Karen: Sure.

Georgia: for rape and kidnapping?

Karen: Yeah.

Georgia: How fucking- how fucked up is that. So the cops can't find the dude who raped and kidnapped you for 15 years-

Karen: He got away!

Georgia: He's free now.

Karen: Sure. Do what you want. Boys will be boys (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 5).

Karen mocks a criminal justice system, which perpetuates patriarchal, rape culture assumption that "boys will be boys," that there is no point in punishing rapists for simply acting according to their gendered nature. In Episode 63 they react to a justice system and media discourse that they see as trivializing violent sex crimes:

Karen: I think it's when eventually, hopefully people start taking rape as a crime more seriously.

Georgia: Right.

Karen: As a real- as something that- this isn't something to have you hand slapped and walked away from, and that a lot of people that do it do it over and over again and intend to do it over and over again and that's a serious problem with a person.

Georgia: And it's not- I feel like there's a lot of people who just think that rape is someone who wants to have sex really bad.

Karen: Exactly.

Georgia: A rapist is someone who's just looking for sex, when if you think about it in a way which it actually is which is this fucking violent insane mind who needs to overpower and hurt and fucking ruin someone. That's- that is a criminal who should not be allowed on the streets after three years good behavior in prison

Karen: And how often do they escalate?

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: I mean, how many stories do we tell that start off with a person doing- he raped a girl in his town-

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: and then da da da, and then he moved to this town and then suddenly he's murdering the people he's raping. I mean, this- it's the story every time.

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: I feel like it's going to catch up slowly as long as we we don't keep-

Georgia: *Sighs* Is it?

Karen: Well I mean I feel like the more people who talk about it, the more people who have conversations, but also the more, like, the Brock Turner-

Georgia: *Sighs* I was just thinking- that's what I was thinking about.

Karen: Yeah, the swimmer from Stanford who got released because you know, nobody wanted to mess up his swimming career and he raped a girls so violently who I think he drugged, I think- I don't know if that ever came out to be the truth, but that's the theory.

Georgia: She was incapacitated.

Karen: She was incapacitated. She- when she told the story it's like she's at a party and all the sudden she's waking up behind a dumpster-

Georgia: Yeah

Karen: and the two men who witness it were so upset, the two men- grown men were crying and-

Georgia: They chased him down.

Karen: and so upset of what they witness that's not something that you go "okay, well don't do this anymore."

Georgia: Yeah!

Karen: Who would do that in the first- it's like we have to start treating it and talking about is as the extremely violent criminal act that it is. And also, stop fucking using the phrase "sexual assault."

Georgia: I was thinking the same thing!

Karen: Stop using euphemisms. If it's rape, it's rape.

Georgia: Some people say like you know sexual assault- it's not sex, don't use the word the word sex when it's just rape.

Karen: No, yeah.

Georgia: Unconsensual, un- sex-

Karen: Nonconsensual sex, yeah.

Georgia: Nonconsensual sex.

Karen: Is rape.

Georgia: Is rape! Sex is between two consenting adults. So don't fucking call it that.

Karen: Also date rape is rape.

Georgia: Date rape is rape.

Karen: It's just rape.

Georgia: It doesn't mean it's nice and chill rape.

Karen: Nope.

Georgia: It's rape.

Karen: Also there's- it wasn't a pre-agreement that that agreement got broken which is what date rape alludes to, that's bullshit.

Georgia: Right. "You went on a date, what did you-

Karen: Yeah.

Georgia: "Someone got upset." No. This person is a rapist.

Karen: yeah. This person-

Georgia: You don't rape people unless you're a rapist.

Karen: Don't rape people!

Georgia: Oh man.

Karen: I mean I think we're coming down pretty hard on an anti-rape stance.

Georgia: I think it's clear that we're anti-rape.

Karen: *Laughs* And we're saying it to our listeners as if we have to convince them.

Georgia: You guys, stop. it.

Karen: Stop. it.

Georgia: We're like yes to fucking crocheted nipple belts, no to rape. Just know where we stand

Karen: We're going to tell you how it works.

Georgia: There's no gray area.

Karen: Oh man (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 63).

Karen and Georgia present a hope that, through creating a critical discourse of the criminal justice system and the way we speak about violent sex crimes, actual change in the system can occur. They see themselves as contributing to the discourse, but, at the same time, as accomplishing nothing of consequence. They frequently mock the idea that they might encourage change through their true crime/comedy podcast, and recognize that when they speak about the injustices of rape they are “preaching to the choir,” as it were.

Though the hosts’ discussion of Mitrice Richardson’s mysterious death is especially poignant given the current social discourse about police racism and violence, the discourse of this particular episode does not well represent the practices of the hosts throughout the majority of the podcast. Overall, MFM represents a critique of patriarchal culture and criminal justice systems through the narrative of the “ideal victim” who is young, white, cisnormative, and middle to upper-middle class. Women often consume true crime narratives featuring victims with whom they can relate (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). Karen and Georgia themselves fit the template of the “ideal victim,” and the stories they tell reflect who makes up their imagined audience.

The narrow sightedness of the true crime genre is especially disconcerting considering news media presents such a similar discourse. Both true crime and news crime are vastly disconnected from the reality of crime (Bisser & Connors, 2012). Crime is the news media’s most popular subject, meaning they constantly perpetuate a vast

amount of misinformation. While crime news also places disproportionate attention on violent crime, unlike true crime it tends to highlight crimes committed by minorities and people of low socioeconomic classes (Bisser & Conners, 2013). In their sensationalized approach to crime, news media outlets also tend to exaggerate crimes against privileged white people. Like previous authors have argued about true crime (Caputi, 1987), Bisser and Conners (2013) argue that news media's representation of crime increases fear of crime violent in a way that is disproportionate to reality. The authors write that this undue fear of crime is, "largely a result of a crime spectacle, a carnival of crime, paraded before [news media consumers] by the mass media" (2010, p. 5).

MFM both perpetuates and disrupts traditional true crime narratives. On the one hand, Karen and Georgia adhere to the template of the "ideal victim," often characterizing the women in their stories according to patriarchal gender traits. However, the hosts add complexity to the construction by glorifying victims as "ideal survivors" who are strong, brave individuals with agency. MFM does not do much to complicate true crime's stereotype of the socio-psychopath, instead categorizing the trope as "worthy adversaries" which at least serves to alleviate blame on the victims themselves. The weasel, on the other hand, adds nuance to the true crime genre by offering a tool through which to criticize white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Finally, though the hosts occasionally venture into important social justice discussions on race and disability, the overall discourse of the podcast tends to further marginalize developmentally disabled people and people of color from murder narratives. Instead, discussion about social justice tends to stem from narratives about ideal victims.

## CHAPTER VI

### LAUGHING AT TRAUMA

MFM offers a potentially healing space for listeners in four ways. Primarily, Karen's and Georgia's dialogue about their reasons for consuming true crime voices the genre's therapeutic value. Secondly, the hosts face the stigma of therapy head on by talking about their own mental health issues. Thirdly, they offer a pedagogical space for women who seek exposure therapy or learning tools to avoid trauma altogether. Finally, they narrativize their own and others' experiences with trauma through a discourse of comedy.

In Episode 1 Georgian tells fans, "this is a safe space for you." MFM offers space in which listeners can forget about taboos, stigma, and judgment and freely express their love of the true crime genre. Karen and Georgia identify some of their own reasons for listening to true crime that other listeners may be able to relate to. In the very first episode, the hosts discuss a grizzly highway accident in Los Angeles:

Georgia: And I had read about it that afternoon and I was like "tell me everything!" Because that's my like- I lo- Car accidents are another thing. I've had two ex boyfriends and one best friend die in car accidents.

Karen: What?

Georgia: Yeah.

Karen: What?!

Georgia: Yeah. Two ex boyfriends. They were ex boyfriends at the time, but they were like important ones from like high school. Died in car accidents. My best friend from high school died in a car accident. Don't drink and drive you guys.

Karen: That's horrible.

Georgia: I know. I just fuckin' want to hear all about it. And I'm also big on like anything could happen at any moment and you'll never know about it. Like, I don't sit near a window at a restaurant because I'm like, "a car's going to come careening through the window and kill me."

Karen: Sure.

Georgia: So that shit's to me like, "tell me everything so I can avoid it!"



Karen: Yes! That's what all this is, really. I just want to collect information and hear theories and stories so that I can be braced so that when I see the weird, ya know, one thing's out of the knife block.

Georgia: Totally

Karen: I'm ready.

Georgia: Totally! Like why is there an open soda can right there.

Karen: I don't drink Pepsi Light!

Georgia: I feel like the law of physics is like, the more you know about something, the less likely its going to happen to you.

Karen: Yes.

Georgia: You know what I mean?

Karen: Sure. Absolutely (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 1).

In the above excerpt the hosts explain their fascination with true crime as a pedagogical tool. Georgia explains that by learning about car accidents, even ones involving her loved ones, she can also learn how to avoid them. Violent narratives transfer over to the true crime genre which women feel teaches them awareness and how to conduct themselves in potentially dangerous situations (Browder, 2006). Here, Karen describes that moment when "one thing's out of the knife block." She wants to learn from true crime how to protect herself if the moment arises when she is confronted by an intruder who wants to kill her.

The hosts introduce episode 2 with a similar discussion:

Karen: I'm Karen

Georgia: And I'm Georgia.

Karen: And we love murder.

Georgia: We love murder. We don't want to get murdered. We love true crime.

Karen: We love true crime. We love talking about bad things that have happened to good people.

Georgia: Yep. Hopefully they won't happen to us if we talk about it enough.

Karen: It's as if we could ward it off with just our positive verbal energies.

Georgia: And our anxiety over getting murdered.

Karen: Because sometimes when you share an anxiety, it alleviates it a little bit.

Georgia: Yeah, I think it also lessens the chance of it happening.

Karen: That's right.

Georgia: *Laughs*

Karen: We're changing the future with our words.

Georgia: We're diffusing the possibility of getting stabbed multiple times.

Karen: We're diffusing the stab bomb (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 2).  
Here, the hosts ascribe power to their own words. Talking about violent crime is a bonding activity, which allows them to alleviate their anxiety over shared recognition of similar interest and fears.

Producing MFM also allows Karen and Georgia to narrativize lifetimes of "insidious trauma," which is an "everyday and ongoing" event not necessarily definable by a singular instance (Muzak, 2009, p. 28).

Georgia: You know what sucks about being a woman is that you never know like if something is nothing or not, you know?

Karen: Yeah, that's right.

Georgia: Like you might just see this guy pacing and you never see him again. Or you might go in your house and he's standing in your living room.

Karen: That's right.

Georgia: Like what is nothing? Like a boyfriend is stalking you or a dude is stalking you. Is it nothing or is this guy going to murder me?

Karen: You just don't know.

Georgia: I mean, not that stalking isn't awful, too, but like is he just like obsessed for the next couple weeks until he finds someone else or is he a murderer?

Karen: That's like the day that I was at the dog park alone at like 7 in the morning and I looked up and there was a guy. I thought at first that he was chipping balls on one side of the dog park, and then I looked and he had a sword.

Georgia: *Laughs* What the fuck?

Karen: And he was just swingin' a sword around and I was just like, "well this is either my last day on earth, or maybe my dog will attack him, but probably not because it's not really her style," and I just waited and he eventually left.

Georgia: Was he like practicing in an open space or just being a fucking weirdo?

Karen: He was by the bushes. So there was a weird element to it.

Georgia: Jesus.

Karen: So it wasn't cool.

Georgia: It's another thing aside from a woman being present where like your guard is down, but like daytime.

Karen: Yes, morning.

Georgia: Guard is down. When it's light out.

Karen: Yeah, you don't expect anything to happen.

Georgia: Which is why it's the perfect time.

Karen: And, dog park.

Georgia: Dog park!

Karen: The most innocent place on earth!

Georgia: Yeah!

Karen: Where only good things happen.  
Georgia: And it smells! Why would you want to go there if you didn't have to.  
Karen: Get out of there (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 2).

In episode 3 Karen and Georgia express the absurdity of their anxiety cultivated over years of fear:

Georgia: But the other night, a couple nights ago, I was thinking about how someone could break in here, and I was thinking about how they could parkour up the wall and into my balcony.  
Karen: *Laughs*  
Georgia: Like just some parkouring criminal.  
Karen: You're afraid to get murdered by Spider-Man?  
Georgia: Yeah.  
Karen: I would be.  
Georgia: Well, yeah.  
Karen: You're the one person he murders instead of saves.  
Georgia: *Laughs* That's right!  
Karen: That would be a bummer (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 3).

Unlike other types of trauma, insidious trauma does not stem from one or multiple clearly definable instances. Instead, it is structural and systemic and accumulates over a lifetime of fear and oppression. For people oppressed by insidious trauma, it is the air they breathe (Muzak, 2009). Karen's comment that women "never know like if something is nothing or not," perfectly encapsulates the effects of insidious trauma caused by violent patriarchal culture on women. Karen expresses her concern that women are forced to practice a constant hypervigilance that keeps them from being able to relax even in a dog park, "where only good things happen" (Episode 2). Similarly, Georgia's concern over a parkouring super-villain in an insight into the kind of absurd fears created by insidious trauma in everyday life.

Their anxieties over becoming victims of violent crime have materially affected how they approach social relationships:

Georgia: I just don't even believe anyone until I know them well enough.

Karen: But I think that's the healthiest way.  
 Georgia: Yeah that's true.  
 Karen: Because I remember being in my twenties and getting tricked by plenty of people who I'm sure were sociopaths or just deep narcissists. And you kind of, I think, eventually you learn. You know, you just start picking up on those signs. And that's a good thing. That's what we're supposed to do.  
 Georgia: This is my therapy session.  
 Karen: *Laughs* Let's do half murder, half like kind of a psychological analysis of how to be.  
 Georgia: Okay!  
 Karen: It's all intertwined, isn't it?  
 Georgia: We should tell everyone, because I mean who else are they going to hear it from?  
 Karen: Yeah listen to us. This is a kind of DIY how to live. It's a lifestyle podcast. With a murder theme. Lifestyle, deathstyle.  
 Georgia: Yeah, how to decorate your murder.  
 Karen: *Laughing*.  
 Georgia: Four DIY ways to decorate your murder (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016, Episode 3).

Karen directly links her experiences with “sociopaths” and “narcissists” in her youth with her social anxiety, which she describes as a healthy learning process. Though they poke fun at the idea of a DIY lifestyle podcast, ultimately the hosts see MFM as a pedagogical tool with which to educate listeners on how to shape their lives according to lessons from Karen's and Georgia's own lived experiences of insidious trauma and from more traditionally traumatic narratives from true crime stories.

That these dialogues exist in a comedic discourse is extremely important. Dark humor, which encompasses laughing at trauma, allows participants to bond over shared experiences of oppression and to subject their oppressors to ridicule, therefore resisting their power (Obrdik, 1942; Thorson, 1993). Humor can also be used to re-narrativizing trauma by allowing survivors to laugh at the absurdity of trauma-induced fears. While Karen and Georgia may be expressing very real fears, they also allow themselves to laugh at the idea of a killer Spider Man, for example.

Traumatic memory operates differently from other types of memory making it difficult to narrativize (Tseris, 2013). Teri Jentz, a survivor of a grizzly attempted homicide, sums up the way it works. Georgia quotes her in episode 64:

Georgia: So she says, “I learned that traumatic memory gets stored in the brain differently from other memories. When a trauma occurs it isn't stored in a narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It gets stored in fragments like shards of broken glass. So one of the things that I found profoundly healing for everyone to do is to put those fragments together in a narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end so you can tell the story of it. You can incorporate it and begin to make sense of it” (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017, Episode 64).

Insidious trauma can be particularly difficult to narrativize in that its causes can be multiple, emotion based, and even conceptual (Muzak, 2009; Tseris, 2013). The inability to express undefinable circumstances of suffering does not meet our society's standard for concrete evidence in a traditional narrative about violence and victimhood. The above excerpts from MFM are examples of two women who have faced lifetimes of intangible oppressive treatment from a patriarchal society. In suppressing women's talk about violence through the medium of true crime, this patriarchal culture has denied them the ability to narrativize their traumatic memories and to establish a discourse, which meaningfully expresses the feelings that the hosts of MFM talk about. MFM produces what has traditionally been called “chit chat” or “gossip” within the trivialized feminine setting of the home and makes it public discourse. But it's not their voices alone that create this discourse. The podcast and its Web 2.0 extensions allow women to align their experiences through participation, collaboration, interaction, and UGC. Together, they produce not only riveting stories of life and death, but also a platform on which women can stand together to speak against the daily trauma they endure and, more insidiously, the pressure to remain silent about it.

Narrativizing traumatic events allows people to make meaning and sense of their traumatic memories (Browder, 2006; Tseris, 2013). Humorous discourse in particular, as seen in Karen and Georgia's jokes about a murderous Spider Man, allows people to cope with oppressive forces and can be used as a therapeutic tool to promote physical healing, positive re-narrativization of traumatic events, and group bonding over similar traumatic experiences (Garrick, 2006).

Cultivation theory and the fear of crime paradox explain women's fear of violent crime as accumulated through media exposure to violent stories and news (Gerbner, 1967; Potter, 2014). However, theorists have discounted both theories through research with media consumers themselves (Ugwu & Britto, 2015). Cultivation theory and the fear of crime paradox do not consider insidious trauma. When Karen and Georgia speak about trauma, they pull from personal memories of their own lives. Above, Karen talks about her justified fear a sword-wielding stranger. Georgia is clearly still affected by the violent deaths of three of her friends, and in Episode 1 she mentions the time she thinks she let a child molester into her house when she was too young to know any better (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016). In Episode 5 Karen speaks about the time she watched a man robbing her house while she and her sister were supposed to be alone inside of it (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016). Terrified for her past self in Episode 45 Georgia reveals the time she followed a stranger to his apartment to do a solo "photo shoot" when she was eighteen (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016). In episode 68 Karen tells a story about the time when she was drunk at a bar and an unknown man attempted to forcibly remove her from the vicinity before one of her male friends could intervene (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017). Looking specifically at the discourse of MFM tells us that anxiety, paranoia, and "mean

world syndrome” comes not from a passive acceptance of media representations of society, but from active, real life experiences. MFM reveals true crime not to be a tool of the fear crime paradox but a safe space for re-narrativization of trauma, meaning making, and healing. Thus, cultivation theory and the fear of crime paradox, especially considering the recent upwards trend in violence against women, become simply another way to police and trivialize women’s media consumption thus pushing them further into silence about violent oppression (FBI, 2015; Truman & Morgan, 2015).

However, the kind of trauma therapy that true crime and specifically MFM offers reveals the narrowness of the podcasts’ imagined audience. They know nothing of the kind of oppression faced by women of color, LGBTQ, or impoverished women in the United States or around the globe. The experiences they explicate in MFM are very limited and thus represent a narrow story of women’s oppression. Much trauma therapy that works to build bonds through humor is done in groups as community building exercises. Humor related to trauma specific to white, middle to upper-middle class, cisnormative women leaves many women out of equation.

Despite its perpetuation of a narrow idea of feminism, MFM does offer positive interpretations of the true crime genre for its narrow imagined audience. Karen and Georgia voice the therapeutic value that true crime has in allowing the genre’s fans to find and build a community of “murderinos.” This relieves feelings of loneliness in particular anxieties. Secondly, by describing themselves as anxious people and delving into their fears and emotions, Karen and Georgia work to de-stigmatize a discourse on mental health and therapy. Third, they offer a platform through which to narrativize insidious traumas. Finally, they promote a pedagogical commentary through which

women can prepare themselves for the potential of violence in their lifetimes. MFM mimics previous true crime as a pedagogical and therapeutic tool (Vicary & Fraley, 2010; Browder, 2006). What it adds, however is a dialogic space with fans and the healing power of comedy.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

MFM focuses strongly on the creation of community bonds between listeners. According to the podcast, “murderinos” all have a few things in common. They have experienced alienation from mainstream culture which views their taste in entertainment as offensive, they consume true crime as therapy and/or as a pedagogical tool, and finally the intersection of true crime and comedy allows them to critique violent and oppressive patriarchal culture.

When murderinos come together, they ignite a positive force. Karen and Georgia envision their podcast as an empowering platform for women, and fans see it the same way. The hosts use their new media platform untethered to commercial interests or institutional demands to send a critical message about a failing justice system and a patriarchal culture, which encourages violent crime. Together, murderinos have raised money for the ACLU and to end the backlog of rape kits yet untested. They champion the stories of survivors and provide meaningful critique of how class and race play into a corrupt justice system.

Despite elements of progressive social action, MFM still perpetuates a conservative image of victimhood and the feminist community. The majority of Karen and Georgia’s narratives tell the stories of “idea victims” and “survivors” who are young, white, middle to upper middle class, cisnormative women. Offenders are usually also white and commit crimes not because of systemic oppression, but because of pure, criminalized insanity. Throughout the podcast, Karen and Georgia will refer to some murder narratives as “interesting” and others as “boring.” Interesting narratives tell

stories of ideal victims or survivors coming face to face with worthy adversaries like Ted Bundy. Boring murders are what Karen and Georgia often refer to as “gang” murders. In the former, the motive is a mystery. These stories are melodramatic, involving conversations of pure evil and the forces of good that overcome them. Gang murders, on the other hand, are knowable, racialized offenses with messy stories where good and evil aren’t always clearly embodied. This provides insight to the tradition of true crime narrative structure which Karen and Georgia are unwilling to disrupt despite a sometimes-progressive social justice commentary.

Ultimately, MFM builds a strong community of murderinos united by feminist goals. However, the feminism of MFM is almost entirely second wave: a narrow portrayal of feminist ideology including only beliefs and values of white, middle to upper-middle class, cisnormative women (Evans, 2013; Gurney 2015). MFM represents a feminist “historical amnesia,” which forgets feminist movements for inclusivity before (Evans, 2013). The podcast’s imagined audience of murderinos is a problematically monolithic one. While the hosts view their establishment of this community as an empowering one, it is only empowering for certain people who have historically been privileged by feminist ideology. In this way, MFM does more to strongly perpetuates true crime status quo than it does to disrupt it.

So, in response to my research question, how does MFM reinforce and/or challenge the traditional true crime narrative? Karen and Georgia reinforce the traditional true crime narrative through their narrow portrayal of who can be the victims of violent crime and through their marginalization of developmentally disabled people who they tend to pit at prone to violence and criminal behavior. MFM also maintains a pedagogical

and therapeutic space for women who have historically look to the genre for lessons and healing. The podcast challenges the true crime genre by creating a feminine and feminist distribution platform for the genre in which two female hosts critique hegemonic masculinity. MFM also gives agency and nuance to the character of the “ideal victim” by glorifying “ideal survivors,” a more feminist representation of the same demographic. Additionally, the hosts’ conversations about justice take into consideration and criticize the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal structure of the justice system which privileges socioeconomically advantaged white men over everyone else. In this way, they work to disrupt the status quo.

There are three key limitations to my study. Primarily, my sample size was small relative to the number of episodes in the entire MFM series. I analyzed merely 10 of 65 episodes. Second, I did not conduct a significant investigation of UGC. This would be a stronger study had I spent time delving into fan comments on various social media or even conducting interviews with fans myself. Finally, I did not speak with the producers. Future research would look to mend these gaps. Proceeding work should widen the sample size. It should also look more deeply into UGC to understand how fans experience the podcast themselves. Future work might also include ethnographic studies among audience member “meet ups” in which small and very large groups of murderinos meet in person to listen to the podcast and talk to each other about it. Additional research would also look to interview Karen and Georgia to more fully understand the podcast via the lens of the producers themselves.

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